JUNE 8, 2026

THE OCEANS ISSUE

A NEW WAVE OF INVESTMENT BY JUSTIN WORLAND

MYSTERIES OF THE UNDERSEA FOREST + THE RACE TO SAVE OUR REEFS

TIME



The Great African Seaforest is home to thousands of animals, many found nowhere else on earth. In kelp forests elsewhere in the world, the removal of a single predator has led to ecosystem collapse

TIME
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Time Off

The Great African Seaforest, off the coast of South Africa

Photograph by Helen Walne—Sea Change Project

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National Bank of Pakistan: The Nation's Bank

For decades, Pakistan's economic story has been one of tantalizing potential held captive by geopolitical risk. But now, on the bustling thoroughfares of Karachi - Pakistan's financial hub - a quiet revolution is underway, orchestrated by the country's most entrenched financial institution, the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP). Founded in 1949, and traditionally regarded as the government's fiscal agent, NBP is rapidly transforming itself into a dynamic, technologically advanced commercial powerhouse -- and an indispensable conduit for the expected flow of global investment into the country.



Rehmat Ali Hasnie,
President & CEO of National Bank of Pakistan

NBP's resurgence reflects the new awareness that now is Pakistan's moment to capitalize on the interest of global investors. Underpinning this belief are key attributes of the country, including a massive population of young people ripe for skills development, untapped natural resources both above and below ground, and a crucial geopolitical location.

NBP sees its role as an institutional architect, using its government-backed capital to support large-scale foreign projects. This is particularly evident in the mines and minerals sector, where NBP's extensive branch network provides essential services in far-flung, sparsely populated areas that commercial banks typically ignore.

NBP president & CEO Rehmat Ali Hasnie has engineered a fundamental pivot of the bank's operational strategy, shifting its identity from a static traditional organization into a resilient, modern financial enterprise. The bank has invested greatly in upgrading IT infrastructure and its branch networks over the past few years, which has been central to the transformation.

Firstly, Hasnie streamlined the flow of international remittances, to the point NBP has processed a considerable percentage of the estimated $38 billion sent home annually by the Pakistani diaspora. Second, technological upgrades have resulted in a notable increase in the use of digital and internet banking features by the local customer base. On the corporate side, the bank's digital transaction volumes have boomed, reaching a colossal $17 billion over five years -- and translating directly into $47 million in non-funded income for the bank. Strategic discipline is evident in NBP's balance sheet. The bank has focused on expanding its low-cost funding base, maintaining a high Current and Savings Account (CASA) ratio, which has reached as high as 82.9%. Furthermore, the bank has demonstrated a commitment to balance sheet optimization by cutting borrowings a staggering $1.44 billion over a six-month period.

The market has responded well. Despite having to absorb the shock of an extraordinary, one-time pension liability charge—a colossal expense of almost $720 million—NBP remains financially robust. Its Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) sits comfortably around 27%, dwarfing the 14% regulatory requirement -- and providing a huge buffer for future growth. This resilience and operational delivery led to the bank being ranked by S&P among the top 10 best-performing Asia Pacific banks in 2024.

The ultimate validation came in early August 2025, when NBP's market capitalization crossed the coveted $1 billion threshold, entering the elite "Billion Dollar Club" on the Pakistan Stock Exchange. By the end of September 2025, market capitalization had exceeded $1.5 billion. For shareholders, this success was tangible: after a prudent retention of profits since 2017, the bank resumed dividend payouts in 2025.

"NBP IS UNDERGOING A MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION, WITH EMPHASIS ON DIGITALIZATION, PRODUCT INNOVATION, AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION," SAYS HASNIE.

NBP remains intrinsically tied to its mandate as the "Nation's Bank." It is the largest lender to the agriculture sector, with an outstanding loan book of approximately $430 million. In addition to its key role regarding food security in Pakistan, the institution was among the first in the country to introduce renewable energy financing. It is also actively applying environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles to its long-term strategy by expanding its green banking products.

The bank is also spearheading a deeper cultural and regulatory shift in the financial landscape by fully embracing Islamic banking. Its Shariah-compliant division, NBP Aitemaad, has been a phenomenal success, with assets surging over 138% in 2024. This acceleration is vital as the bank works toward a full conversion of its operations to Shariah-compliant banking by the 2027 regulatory deadline.

"As the Nation's Bank, we remain committed to enhancing service quality, diversifying our reach, and broadening financial access across Pakistan. This is a bank that has learned to leverage its history, not as an anchor, but as a powerful platform for change on a national level." With fiscal consolidation on track and a government actively courting foreign direct investment in sectors with high potential -- like IT, mines & minerals, renewable energy, and textiles -- Pakistan offers investors an opportunity to align with a major economic transition. The volatility of the past is being replaced by the predictability of steady reform.

By stabilizing its own foundation and investing in modernization, NBP is building the resilient financial infrastructure necessary to attract long-term international investment, and reinforcing the spirit of "Aik Azm, Ek Pehchaan – National Bank Aor Pakistan," the identity that drives the National Bank of Pakistan forward.

NBP
National Bank اور Pakistan



Artificial intelligence goes to work

In Miami on May 1, TIME convened a panel of business leaders to discuss how they are preparing for—and responding to—the impact of AI on their operations. Moderated by TIME executive editor Nikhil Kumar, far left, the conversation, presented by Philip Morris International U.S., brought together, from left, Sarah Meron of IBM, Kaylen McNamara of VaynerX, and Olivia Ramos of Deepblocks. "Embracing technological change," said Meron, is a crucial element of helping a business survive long term.

Introducing TIME Games

Play seven different daily puzzles at the new **time.com/games,** from classics like Sudoku to original concepts like Linked, the word-association game below. *(Find the answer on the side of this page.)*

Pick one word in each column to create a connection from ***Rock*** *to* ***Sum***

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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In the TIME100 Philanthropy list (May 25) we mischaracterized Kate Capshaw's portraits of unhoused people; they are paintings.

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On the covers



Photograph by Ariel Fisher for TIME



Photograph by Greta Rybus for TIME



Photograph by Helen Walne—Sea Change Project

DIGITAL COVER

On May 15, TIME released a digital-only cover marking President Donald Trump's state visit to China. President Xi Jinping faces a range of challenges there, including a struggling economy, but the optics of the meeting underscored the difficult position in which Trump currently finds himself. Read more in this issue in the Brief.



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ARASCO: The Powerhouse Feeding the Middle East

The architectural miracle of Saudi Arabia's modern economy is often portrayed with neon-lit giga-projects. Meanwhile, its most critical infrastructure can seem mundane and may be overlooked – yet it underpins a system that feeds 36 million people every day. At the center of this vital mission is ARASCO, the Riyadh-based group that has spent more than 43 years evolving into what Group CEO Ziyad Al-Sheikh calls the "upstream engine of the protein ecosystem."

To understand ARASCO is to grasp the sheer scale of the Kingdom's $27 billion protein market. The company anchors the Kingdom's food security ecosystem, handling approximately 25% of the nation's non-wheat grain imports and maintaining a discharge capacity of 5 million metric tons. Across the food value chain, the company has built an integrated operating platform, with capabilities extending from global grain sourcing and specialized dry bulk shipping to more than 4 million metric tons of annual compound feed manufacturing capacity – strengthening both the efficiency and resilience of the Kingdom's food system. ARASCO is a diversified group operating across integrated value chains that contribute to the Kingdom's food system. Its core platforms include the Animal Nutrition Company (feed, grain sourcing, logistics, and livestock farming), Al Emar (agri-inputs and veterinary products and services), Entaj (integrated poultry operations), MEFSCO (corn milling and sweeteners), and IDAC Merieux (food safety and quality services).

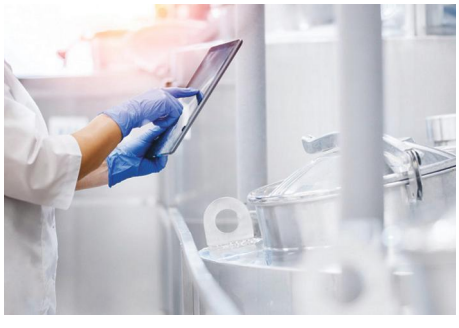
This is in addition to various investments that strengthen its position in the market, such as Bahri Dry Bulk (marine logistics). Through these coordinated capabilities and long-term investments, ARASCO acts as a facilitator of Saudi Arabia's food ecosystem in alignment with Vision 2030 by boosting the efficiency, reliability, and development of the agri-food sector. ARASCO's market leadership is reinforced by a "who's who" of global industrial partnerships. In 2013, the company formed a landmark joint venture with Cargill, the world's largest agri-food corporation, to establish the Middle East Food Solutions Company (MEFSCO). As the only manufacturer of its kind in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), MEFSCO processes corn into essential starches and sweeteners, serving as a critical supplier to the region's food, beverage, and industrial sectors. This efficiency ripples through the entire value chain. For the local farmer, ARASCO isn't just a supplier, it is a productivity partner. "Our role goes beyond feed production," says Ziyad Al-Sheikh. "We enable the entire animal protein value chain by providing the backbone that makes local production more competitive, scalable, and sustainable." The benefits of this partnership are evident in improved performance thanks to technical expertise, animal health solutions, and reliable access to inputs. The true test of a company's resilience is how it responds during periods of global disruption. During the pandemic and Red Sea maritime disruptions, ARASCO's integrated model demonstrated operational stability. The company supports more than 26 million animals daily, and its logistics arm, in partnership with Bahri, operates five Panamax vessels. This arrangement helps mitigate volatility in global grain markets and promotes continuity of supply within the Kingdom. While its heritage is rooted in grain, ARASCO's future is in the high-value consumer space. Its poultry brand, Entaj, has seen explosive growth, recently doubling its production capacity from 300,000 to 600,000 birds per day—amounting to over 185 million birds annually. In the first three quarters of 2025 alone, Entaj generated more than $266 million in revenue, cementing its position in a fresh poultry market where fresh and chilled products command a 52.7% share of the poultry market in Saudi Arabia. Now, it is setting its sights on the fragmented red meat market with "Marabina." With the Kingdom already reaching 62% self-sufficiency in red meat, ARASCO is poised to make the sector more efficient and professional in overseeing its 22 million sheep and 7.7 million goats. "Innovation for us is always tied to performance, efficiency, and real economic impact," says Al-Sheikh. Ultimately, an investment in ARASCO is an investment in the stability of the Middle East. As the company looks to export its know-how across the GCC, it is positioning itself as a regional standard-bearer for animal nutrition and food production. In the words of Ziyad Al-Sheikh: "Food security starts at the foundation. If nutrition is efficient, supply is stable, and systems are integrated, then the entire ecosystem performs." For the discerning investor, ARASCO brings together a strong market position, measurable efficiency gains of more than 15%, and a meaningful contribution to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 food security transformation. In the context of the Middle East's economic transformation, ARASCO contributes through integrated operations and long-term investments that support sustainable food production.



Ziyad Al-Sheikh Group CEO ARASCO







ARASCO أراسكو



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The Brief



POWER TRIP

BY CHARLIE CAMPBELL

President Trump's visit to China underscored how global authority is shifting to the East

INSIDE

EBOLA OUTBREAK CROSSES BORDERS

THE FEDS OPEN THEIR UFO FILES

THE PRICE OF A SEAT AT A WORLD CUP MATCH

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVAN VUCCI

He may have descended Air Force One late May 13 to the cheers of schoolchildren brandishing the Stars and Stripes, and flanked by tech's most influential tycoons, but it didn't take long for U.S. President Donald Trump to be put in his place in Beijing.

In their first closed-door discussions, Chinese President Xi Jinping issued a stinging rebuke on American arms sales to Taiwan, warning the superpowers could "collide or even enter into conflict" over the self-ruling island, over which China claims sovereignty.

Given that Trump can explode at even relatively trifling perceived affronts—pulling 5,000 American troops out of Germany after Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the U.S. had been "humiliated" in Iran—it was telling that Xi felt empowered to lay down the law from the get-go. Indeed, the most enduring image from the entire visit is the two leaders standing outside the Ming dynasty Temple of Heaven, with Trump remaining curiously tight-lipped as reporters inquired whether they had discussed Taiwan. "China is beautiful," Trump offered instead.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio insisted that U.S. policy on Taiwan remained unchanged. But the optics of the U.S. President, for whom belligerence has long been a badge of honor, appearing awkward and cowed is a stark illustration of the shifting balance of global power. "Xi felt he has a license to make discordant warnings seemingly without concern about blowback or displeasure from Trump's side," says Sung Wen-ti, a scholar focused on China's leadership at the Australian National University. "He appeared tough in public in front of Trump and got away with it."

'He appeared tough in public in front of Trump and got away with it.'

—SUNG WEN-TI, SCHOLAR OF CHINESE LEADERSHIP

THAT PROJECTION OF STRENGTH may be surprising given the very real challenges China faces, including an economy struggling from a prolonged property crisis, weak consumer demand, and slowing growth.

But China has also proved extraordinarily resilient, with a record $1.2 trillion trade surplus last year despite U.S. tariffs that peaked at 145%. In April, China reported record monthly exports, rising 14.1% year on year, owed partly to buoyant demand for green-tech products, from electric vehicles to wind turbines and batteries, demonstrating its ability to not just withstand disruptions from the Iran war but benefit from it. That includes the soft-power rewards of Washington's tarnishing its international image, particularly across the Global South, which disproportionately feels the brunt of soaring energy prices.

Beijing's contention has always been that "America behaves as a thuggish, self-interested warmonger," says Nick Bisley, a professor of international relations at Australia's La Trobe University. "And it's like, 'Yep, this ticks the box.'"

Whether fallout from Iran had sapped his mojo, or he was merely beset by jet lag, Trump appeared on the back foot throughout his stint in the Middle Kingdom. He did not regale reporters on the long flight to Beijing, and when he posted on Truth Social, it was to defend Xi, who had implied that the U.S. was in decline by warning of the dangers of a Thucydides trap—when an ascendent power and a weakening one may come to blows.

Trump spoke not of statecraft but of deals, touting a Chinese commitment to purchase 200 Boeing aircraft, saying "that's a lot of jobs." The White House later said China agreed to purchase at least $17 billion of American agricultural products per year through 2028, on top of the 25 million metric tons of soybeans annually over the same period agreed in October. "The headline numbers look very impressive," says Chong Ja Ian, a professor of international relations at the National University of Singapore. "But I would be a little bit cautious, because we've seen this movie before whether the Chinese side follows through."

Xi will be gladdened by the sheer number of long-standing bugbears that were given a pass, including religious rights, media freedoms, labor rights, the crackdown on Tibetans and Uighur Muslims, eroding freedoms in semiautonomous Hong Kong, and Chinese support for Russia and North Korea. There wasn't even a sense that Trump tried to hold Beijing's feet to the fire on strategic matters such as cyberespionage, IP theft, or the export of fentanyl precursors.

Xi's choice of words also spoke volumes. China is never shy about trumpeting its "partnerships" with scores of nations, even though they're invariably lopsided and wholly transactional. But with Trump, Xi eschewed any semblance of partnership and merely advocated a framework of "constructive strategic stability," indicating he's settled that the U.S. is a rival and, while not wanting ties to spiral, is confident in China's ability to hold its own.

As Trump departed Beijing on May 15, he gave a fist pump at the door of Air Force One, while another cheering crowd waved more U.S. flags. "It's been an incredible visit," Trump told Xi. "I think a lot of good has come of it."

But it was difficult to see the trip as anything other than a changing of the guard. ◻

The Brief includes reporting by Simmone Shah



Temperature check at a border crossing between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo

THE BULLETIN

WHO declares global Ebola emergency

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION declared a fast-moving Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda a "public health emergency of international concern" on May 17, after the virus killed nearly 90 people and spread across an area blighted by conflict. WHO officials said the outbreak didn't meet the criteria for a pandemic emergency but warned of a "high regional risk" owing to population movement, porous borders, and ongoing transmission in multiple health zones.

NO VACCINE WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was "deeply concerned about the scale and speed of the epidemic" in a briefing at the World Health Assembly in Geneva on May 19. By then, the number of deaths had risen to more than 130 and suspected cases to at least 500.

Health officials said the outbreak was being driven by the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, a rare variant first identified in Uganda in 2007. The strain has been reported in two previous outbreaks but has no approved virus-specific therapeutics or vaccines. The virus is transmitted through direct contact with bodily fluids, including blood, vomit, and other contaminated materials, and becomes contagious once symptoms appear. Those symptoms can include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain, and internal or external bleeding. Initial laboratory tests were not capable of detecting the Bundibugyo strain, delaying confirmation of the outbreak, according to the WHO.

RELIEF HINDERED Violence in eastern Congo, including attacks by armed groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces and M23, has limited access for health workers and disrupted contact-tracing efforts, the WHO said. Officials noted that only a small fraction of suspected cases have been confirmed in laboratories so far, highlighting uncertainty about the outbreak's true scale.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE The WHO's declaration—its second highest alert level—is intended to mobilize international coordination, funding, and response capacity. The agency urged countries to strengthen surveillance, isolate confirmed cases, and monitor contacts for up to 21 days, while discouraging border closures that could drive cases underground.

But the global response system is hampered by the shuttering of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which played a central role in containing previous Ebola outbreaks, and the withdrawal of the U.S. from the WHO in January.

The DRC has experienced at least 17 Ebola outbreaks since the virus was first identified in 1976. The largest outbreak from 2018 to 2020 killed nearly 2,300 people.

—NANDIKA CHATTERJEE

OPENING PAGE: POOL PHOTO/GETTY IMAGES: EBOLA: BADRU KATUMBA—AFP/GETTY IMAGES

GOOD QUESTION

What's in the Pentagon's newly released UFO files?

BY JEFFREY KLUGER

ON MAY 8, PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP ORDERED THE release of more than 170 files on a Department of Defense website that included reported eyewitness accounts of unidentified flying objects—or what are now more decorously known as unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAPs). Some of the accounts are from layfolk, some are from commercial pilots, and some from Navy pilots who have captured videos through their windshields of what appear to be alien craft bobbing and hovering in ways no known aircraft can manage. Here are some of the most intriguing examples of the reports, sure to generate speculation, but at this point likely to remain a mystery.

On Aug. 9, 1952, in a teletype labeled "URGENT," addressed to then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, two employees of the DuPont Chemical plant in Savannah River, S.C., reported seeing "a blue light with an orange fringe shaped like a saucer." It made its appearance at 9:30 p.m., "flying at a high rate of speed and traveling in a northeastern direction."

The message did reach Hoover, and two days later, he responded—with a not-my-department demurral. "Inasmuch as the matter of the flying saucers is being investigated by the United States Air Force," he wrote, "I am … forwarding a copy of your letter to the Director of Special Investigations, Department of the Air Force."

Another incident was more hands-on. On Sept. 27, 1950, two officers with the Philadelphia police department were patrolling in their squad car when they reportedly saw a 6-ft.-wide object landing gently in a nearby field. "The officers, upon examining it, noted that it gave off a purplish glow," according to the report. "After looking at the object for some time, they attempted to pick it up. The object broke, leaving a slight odorless residue. Over a period of about 25 minutes … it completely disintegrated."

COMMERCIAL-AIRLINE PILOTS HAVE filed sightings too. On Aug. 4, 1947, a Pan American airliner flying the route from Gander, Newfoundland, to LaGuardia Field in New York City said that they came upon a flying, gold-colored cylinder, about 15 ft. long. One of the pilots "estimated the speed of the object at about 175 miles per hour, and that it was traveling in an easterly direction," according to the file. The other pilot then spotted a similar object on the other side of the plane. The sightings continued for 90 seconds before the object vanished.

A report was even filed by the Gemini 7 mission. On Dec. 4, 1965, after the spacecraft reached orbit, the crew separated from the upper-stage booster and turned around to face that spent segment. The astronauts, commander Frank Borman and pilot Jim Lovell, saw not just the upper stage but also another, larger object they could not explain.

"We have a bogey at 10:00 o'clock high … This is an actual sighting," called Borman. In a scribbled note that is part of the document dump, a NASA official wrote the words "UFO sighting by Borman."

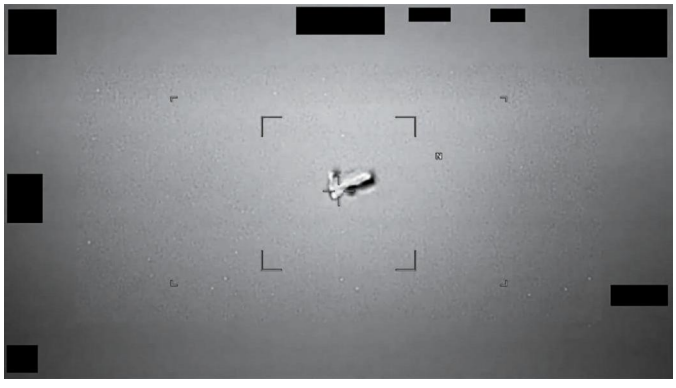
It's the naval-aviator sightings, however, that are generating the most buzz, because they have video evidence to back them up. The document tranche includes a Jan. 1, 2020, encounter—with the video included online—of a bright, dancing point moving erratically, spotted by the pilot of an aircraft patrolling the skies over the Middle East. The object lingered in sight for one minute and three seconds before it disappeared.

Even more striking was the sighting on New Year's Day 2024, of a football-shaped body with three finlike projections, one pointing vertically and two pointing downward at 45-degree angles. That object remained visible for just nine seconds before disappearing.

Perhaps most sensational of all however were the fresh details about a 1 min. 46 sec. appearance in 2013 of an eight-pointed starlike body swerving and maneuvering in front of a naval jet, leaving a fine contrail of exhaust behind it.

All of the reports in the files remain objects of speculation and will be followed by more such reports, which the Department of Defense promises will be forthcoming "on a rolling basis." If the UAPs are out there, the American public will have the opportunity to learn about them. ◻

A football-shaped UAP seen by a U.S. naval aviator in the skies near Japan



'We have a bogey at 10 o'clock high … This is an actual sighting.'

—FRANK BORMAN, ASTRONAUT

UFO: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE—GETTY IMAGES; COLBERT: SCOTT KOWALCHYK—CBS/GETTY IMAGES; MUSK: GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ—AP; EUROVISION: GEORG HOCHMUTH—APA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

DISCOVERED
A 2,000-year-old **mummy with a papyrus fragment of Homer's *Iliad*,** by archaeologists from the Mission of the University of Barcelona, the university said on April 20.

SOLD
Jackson Pollock's ***Number 7A, 1948,*** widely considered one of the first abstract paintings, at auction for a record $181 million on May 18.

DIED
Former Massachusetts Representative and champion of gay rights, **Barney Frank,** at 86, on May 19, according to reports.

DROPPED
President Donald Trump's **$10 billion lawsuit against the IRS over his leaked tax returns,** in exchange for the creation of a $1.8 billion taxpayer-funded "antiweaponization fund" to compensate those who allege they were unfairly targeted by the Biden Administration.

WON
The Eurovision Song Contest, by **Bulgaria's Dara** on May 16, marking the country's first win since the international music competition began in 1956.





AIRED

The Late Show's last bow

Stephen Colbert says good night

BY REBECCA SOFFER

STEPHEN COLBERT TOOK OVER *THE LATE SHOW* FROM ITS ORIGinal host, David Letterman, in 2015—and in the years between then and the show's final episode, which aired May 21, he achieved something extraordinary: making it normal to talk about the hardest parts of being alive.

Colbert wasn't just funny, he had a way of revealing the full scope of a guest's humanity. He created moments where difficult human experiences weren't packaged into something easier to sit with or made tidy. They stayed there, unresolved, in front of millions, like his 2021 interview with actor Andrew Garfield, who spoke about grieving his mother, or one of Colbert's many conversations with Anderson Cooper, reflecting on the deaths of Cooper's parents with a clarity that didn't rush toward closure. Colbert himself often returned to the loss of his father and brothers in a plane crash when he was a child, as well as his mother's death.

These moments didn't resolve. They didn't pivot neatly back to promotion or punch lines. They simply existed, often sandwiched between humorous and sometimes absurd segments. Television often struggles to hold difficult human experience unless it can be shaped into something digestible, or it's reserved for moments of collective catastrophe. In last year's acceptance speech after winning his Emmy for Outstanding Talk Series, Colbert shared how he had set out to make a late-night show about love, but later realized "we were doing a late-night comedy show about loss. And that's related to love, because sometimes you only truly know how much you love something when you get a sense you might be losing it." In his decades of late-night television, Colbert showed that love and loss are inseparable.

Soffer is a former producer of The Colbert Report

LOST

Elon Musk

OpenAI lawsuit

A California jury dealt a blow to Elon Musk's AI ambitions on May 18 by rejecting his lawsuit against his competitor and onetime associate Sam Altman. Objecting to OpenAI turning for-profit, Musk sued in 2024. The jury found that statutory deadlines had been exceeded; Musk has said he will appeal.

If the suit had proceeded, OpenAI and its partner Microsoft could have owed up to roughly $150 billion in damages and Altman might have been removed from OpenAI's board. Instead, Musk's own AI company looks weaker than ever, says analyst Peter Wildeford. During the trial, Musk seemed to admit that SpaceXAI "partly" trains its chatbot on OpenAI's models, a strategy often adopted by lagging AI companies. Outside the courtroom, SpaceXAI agreed to rent all of the computing capacity at one of its flagship data centers to competitor Anthropic. In an acrimonious AI race, the verdict is the latest sign that Musk may be falling behind the pack.

—Nikita Ostrovsky





The home of the Kansas City Chiefs is hosting six World Cup games

CHARLIE RIEDEL—AP

The high price of attending the World Cup

BY SEAN GREGORY

THERE'S THE VIRAL AD FROM CANADIAN CARRIER AIR Transat, showing how much cheaper it is to fly to some countries than attend their soccer games at the World Cup. "Watch England, tickets at $3,402. See England, round-trip tickets starting at $779." Then there are the eye-popping asking prices on the World Cup secondary market. In mid-May, on FIFA's resale platform, the cheapest ticket for the July 19 World Cup final at MetLife Stadium outside New York City was going for $9,200. The richest asking price: $11,499,998.55 (good luck shedding that one, pal). And don't forget the brouhaha over train fare. NJ Transit announced in April that it would charge fans $150 to get from Penn Station to MetLife on game days, a round trip that typically costs around $13. In May, it cut the price to $98.

The 2026 World Cup, co-hosted by the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, is costing a small fortune for both spectators and local governments tasked with welcoming international soccer fans. "Football Unites the World," FIFA is fond of boasting. But this year's tournament risks bringing together fans of a certain tax bracket while pricing out some of the game's most passionate supporters.

FIFA has embraced the sort of dynamic pricing customers find when shopping for airline tickets. Costs fluctuate in real time based on demand. In May, for example, it was charging, at face value, $1,940 for an upper-tier seat to the opener for the U.S. men's national team, a game against Paraguay at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, Calif., on June 12. And FIFA's own resale site charges both buyer and seller an additional 15%, increasing the soccer body's haul as seats change hands. "There's some element of greed there," says Kate Ashley, a professor at Northeastern University's D'Amore-McKim School of Business. To justify this model, FIFA president Gianni Infantino has pointed to the robust U.S. resale market: since tickets are likely to sell above face value on a secondary platform, the organization is trying to match those numbers in initial sale price as much as possible.

'There's some element of greed there.'

—KATE ASHLEY, PROFESSOR AT NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

FIFA'S APPROACH COULD backfire. Plenty of tickets remain unsold—anyone up for $1,300 front-level tickets for the Haiti-Scotland group-stage matchup in Foxboro, Mass., on June 13? Plus, sticker shock may be deterring travelers from making the trip. According to a report from the American Hotel & Lodging Association released in early May, close to 80% of survey respondents across U.S. host cities said that bookings are tracking below initial expectations. "Forecasts show that domestic travelers are outpacing international travelers," the report concluded, which is concerning for metro areas betting on an economic boost. International visitors spend money in hotels, restaurants, and shops that would not otherwise be spent.

Thankfully, fans can still hack this pricey World Cup. Over the 30-day period prior to May 19, secondary-market prices dropped more than 20%, on average, for group-stage matches, according to Ticketdata.com. You could keep waiting it out for even better deals. Host cities are also staging free fan fests and watch parties at places like Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta. "It's great to be inside the stadium at a match," says Lee Igel, a professor at NYU's Tisch Institute for Global Sport. "Sometimes it's equally great to be outside of the stadium, or further away from the stadium, and just be around people who are enjoying themselves around this sport." Like at the pub, that classic World Cup locale, sharing an experience with other rabid supporters in front of a big screen. Ten-buck pitchers instead of $2,000 seats? There have been worse backup plans. ◻



GRIMALDI GROUP - Engineering the Future of Global Shipping

In today's volatile business climate – where global trade faces buffeting by geopolitical storms and protectionist tensions -- the Grimaldi Group stands as a symbol of industrial resilience and technological innovation. Under the leadership of managing director Emanuele Grimaldi, alongside chairman Gianluca Grimaldi and fellow managing director Diego Pacella, the Naples-based shipping giant is charting a course for the global shipping industry to navigate the maritime world. The Group's recent trajectory is characterized by what Emanuele Grimaldi calls a "true revolution" in maritime logistics. Moving far beyond the legacy systems of the 20th century, the company has embarked on a massive fleet renewal program that positions it at the very vanguard of environmental and operational innovation. Central to Grimaldi's plan for the future is a new generation of vessels that redefine modern shipping. The Group has recently introduced into service 14 "sister" ships, including the Eco Napoli, which are at the forefront of maritime transport of rolling freight in the Mediterranean and in Northern Europe. In a staggering feat of engineering, these vessels have reduced fuel consumption per transported unit by 50% or more, compared with previous models.

"We are further expanding our fleet with 17 brand-new ships with transport capacity of 9,000 cars each that have smaller engines than the 4,000-car ships we had before," says Mr. Grimaldi. With 50% reduction in emissions, the Group's latest car carriers—representing the largest order in the world for such vessels—are, he adds, "totally cutting-edge ships that already today achieve a very important goal."

The major achievement of Grimaldi's innovation strategy, though, lies in its fuel flexibility. These new vessels are "ammonia-ready," meaning they are prepared for a future where engines emit zero carbon. The Group also currently has nine dual-fuel vessels under construction, ships that will be capable of running on methanol too, thus revolutionizing the combined transport of passengers and freight in Europe.



Dr Emanuele Grimaldi
Managing Director of the Grimaldi Group

A Legacy of Excellence

This relentless pursuit of innovation has caught the attention of the international community, which has recently bestowed a number of awards on the company -- underscoring its position as an industry titan. Last October, in recognition of its comprehensive ESG (environmental, social, and governance) project, the Group received the Business Award at the prestigious Spain Talks Awards in Rome. This was followed in December by the China Awards 2025, where Grimaldi was honored in the "Top Investors" category for its strategic vision and a fleet renewal program that saw 63 vessels commissioned from Chinese shipyards over the last 15 years. In January, the Group was also honored with the Sustainable Shipping Award at the inaugural Saudi Maritime Awards. Perhaps most telling of the Group's regional influence was the high-profile honor conferred on Mr. Grimaldi in Malta, where he was appointed honorary member of the National Order of Merit. This honor is in recognition of Mr. Grimaldi's personal commitment to Malta's maritime economy, while also acknowledging the Group's role as a logistical backbone at the service of the transport industry. Innovation at Grimaldi is not confined to the open sea, but rather extends to the very infrastructure of global trade. The Group is currently leading a transformation of maritime terminals into "smart ports" integrating digital technologies, automation, and sustainable solutions to enhance efficiency, connectivity, and user experience on shore.

The Group has secured long-term concessions for critical hubs like the ports of Igoumenitsa and Heraklion in Greece. A number of advancements have since been put in place, including wind turbines and photovoltaic systems, while shore power connections are expected to be introduced over the next few years. Supporting this physical infrastructure is an elite R&D division—a "studies office" operating at the forefront of maritime science. This department doesn't just study fuels and new technologies, it comes up with solutions. The Group recently filed patents in the field of microplastics, developing specialized filters to clean the oceans as their ships pass through them. In a distinct display of corporate philosophy, the profits from these patents have been donated to charitable foundations.

As the company looks toward 2027, the challenges are significant. From protectionist tensions to turbulent global geopolitics, the path ahead will be challenging. Yet the Group's results reflect a profound resilience. Early data show that 2026 is already outperforming 2025.

"Navigating in calm seas is something everyone can do," says Mr. Grimaldi. "The real challenge is when ships are in a storm." By keeping a steady hand on the wheel and continuing to introduce the most modern, high-performance ships in the world, the Grimaldi Group ensures that it is not just weathering the storm—it is leading the way out of it.

With a combined focus on "low fuel consumption, very few emissions, and the possibility of achieving zero emissions," Grimaldi has defined the hallmark of the new era of sustainable shipping.

GRIMALDI GROUP



Fire season

A helicopter water tanker assists firefighters attempting to control the Sandy Fire in Simi Valley, Calif., on May 19. The blaze about 35 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles was one of five fires of more than 1,000 acres each that appeared to announce an early start to the Southern California peak wildfire season, which historically begins in June and runs through October. High winds, high temperatures, and another dry winter have residents on edge. Battalion chief David Acuña of the department of forestry and fire protection told the Los Angeles *Times,* "You can kind of imagine that all of Southern California is like a haystack right now, waiting for a single spark."

Photograph by Caroline Brehman—AP



5 ways to get more out of your daily walks

BY ANGELA HAUPT



AS FAR AS EXERCISE ROUTINES GO, walking seems fairly straightforward: You put one foot in front of the other, and keep going until you reach your destination or decide you've had enough.

Yet how you walk—your pace, posture, stride, and even what's on your feet—shapes how much you actually get out of it. "People take walking for granted and don't recognize the inherent power in doing it correctly," says Milica McDowell, a physical therapist and co-author of the new book *Walk: Rediscover the Most Natural Way to Boost Your Health and Longevity One Step at a Time*. "From a big-picture perspective, doing it well amps up your benefits and reduces your risk of problems."

In fact, walking speed has been called a "sixth vital sign," McDowell says—a metric clinicians should hold "in as high a regard as your heart rate, your breathing rate, your oxygenation, and your body temperature." Research suggests that slower gait speed is associated with an increased risk of developing dementia, sometimes years before diagnosis.

Footwear is another blind spot. Research has found that more than 60% of adults wear shoes that are the wrong size, often because they assumed their feet stopped changing the day they stopped growing taller. "That's a huge misconception," McDowell says.

Walking correctly will help ensure you can do America's favorite form of exercise for as long as possible. Research suggests that walking roughly 8,700 steps a day cuts the risk of dying from any cause by 60% compared with walking 2,000 steps daily, and it's particularly good at guarding against heart disease.

So what's standing between you and those benefits? We asked experts how to get more out of your walks.

1. Increase your pace

A leisurely stroll might feel relaxing, but it's a missed opportunity for your health. To check your pace, McDowell suggests a quick self-test: Count your steps for 15 seconds, and multiply by four to get your steps per minute. "Most people walk around 100 steps per minute," she says, but the bigger health benefits—fat burning and cardiovascular gains—kick in around 120 to 130.

2. Watch your arms

Walking with your hands clasped behind your back is a surprisingly bad habit. "If you were to lose your balance and start to fall, it's very difficult to fall safely," McDowell says. It also throws off your posture and often produces a shuffling gait that makes tripping more likely. The best practice is to let your arms swing freely, and your torso and lower body will follow.

3. Replace your shoes

Walking shoes are good for around 300 to 400 miles, "and a lot of us, myself included, let our shoes go too long," says Dr. David Sabgir, a cardiologist and founder of the nonprofit Walk With a Doc. That can lead to foot, knee, and back problems. To check for a clue that you're walking correctly in supportive shoes, flip your sneakers over: a healthy wear pattern looks like the number 7, angling from the outer heel toward the big toe.

4. Pay attention to your toes

The strength of your big toe is a decent predictor of whether you'll fall as you age. Research has linked weaker big-toe flexion strength—your ability to press the toe firmly into the ground—to poorer balance and a higher fall risk. The toe is also responsible for propulsion, the final push that drives each step forward. A test McDowell calls toe yoga gives clues about your toe strength. Sit barefoot in a chair, lift just your big toe while the other four stay flat on the floor, and then reverse it—big toe down, little toes up. "Most people can't do that," she says. But "even practicing for a week, people start to notice a difference."

5. Find some hills

"Walking is a category of a bunch of moves," says biomechanist Katy Bowman, and trotting down flat sidewalks at one speed misses most of them. She recommends seeking out hills whenever you can, or finding a curb and practicing walking with one foot up and one down. The payoff isn't just cardiovascular: uneven terrain challenges balance and body awareness in ways flat pavement can't.

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY TIME; SOURCE IMAGES: TARA MOORE—GETTY IMAGES (3); WE ARE/GETTY IMAGES

The View

SOCIETY

HOW TO FIX THE INTERNET

BY HANK GREEN

I'm going to tell you something embarrassing. For a long time, I thought the internet would immediately make society better. How could it not? A world where everyone was more connected would be a world where everyone was more empathetic. The gatekeepers would fall. There would be more access, more expertise, more chances for curiosity to be rewarded. This is not what happened.

INSIDE

A FATHER-SON ACT IN BRAZILIAN POLITICS

THE BOOK ON PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES

LUNA MOTHS AND A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

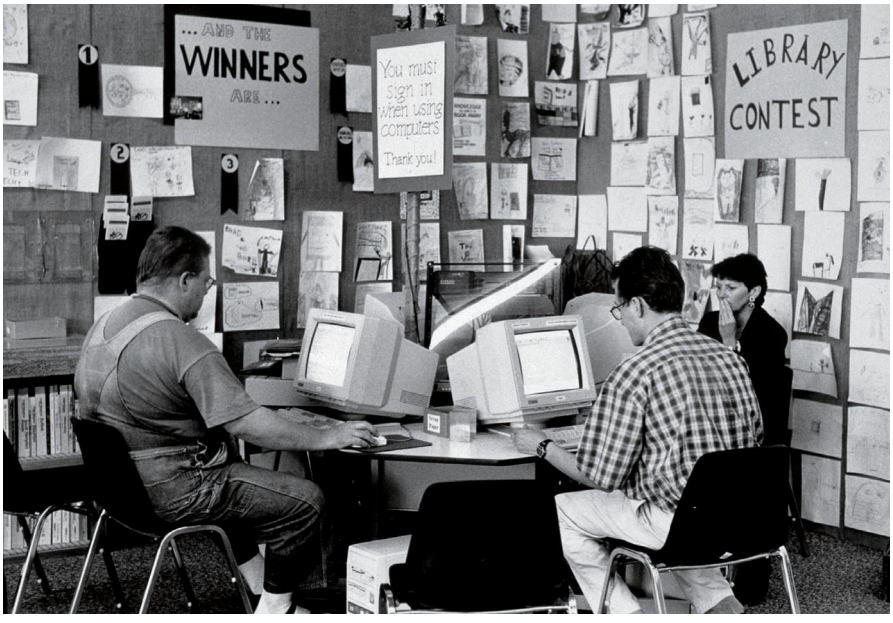
There are good parts, of course. We really did get access to many lifetimes' worth of high-quality information, but it turns out the information doesn't matter that much. Once we had infinite content, what mattered more than anything else was which bits were easiest to pay attention to.

An entire professional class of content creators emerged whose job was to figure out how to make their little video more engaging, watchable, and unignorable than the next. We entered an attention arms race. And we did it with the help of recommendation algorithms designed to amplify even the tiniest difference in the ability of a piece of content to hold your attention.

As a YouTuber, I too try to capture people's attention. I make a lot of educational and pro-social content, but our systems are not designed to reward it. Our social media ecosystem can't consistently measure how true something is. All the algorithms know is whether you click or, on the newer platforms, whether you keep watching what is served to you.

The issue: paying attention is not the same thing as understanding. In fact, a lot of the time, it is in direct conflict with understanding. The result: a media environment that slices the world into the simplest possible shapes. Heroes and villains. Panic and certainty. Fear and superiority. Danger and outrage. When you feed a piece of information into the social media salience machine, it always comes out worse.

But I have found a bit of hope in an unusual place. In the 1890s, the newspaper business changed. Cheap printing, telegraph wires, and easier distribution were powerful technologies for which we did not have a strong set of social norms. It became more profitable for a paper to focus on growth, rather than being useful to a loyal set of readers. And getting bigger often meant publishing more stories that were more arresting, more scandalous, more emotionally loaded. What grabbed readers' attention? Crime, vice, corruption, foreign danger, and social collapse. Meanwhile, newspaper barons with names like Hearst and Pulitzer got fabulously wealthy.



Online in a Blacksburg, Va., library in the headier days of 1995

But this era of "yellow journalism" did not last forever. It burned hot, warped incentives, did real damage, but then, over time, consumers began to prioritize credibility. People got tired of yellow journalism. In response, newspapers began focusing on building trusted brands.

THERE IS ALWAYS a market for the truth. There is a market for not being manipulated. There is a market for information that is still useful after the initial jolt of emotion wears off.

I cannot help but believe that this history will repeat itself. Today, people are tired of AI slop and misinformation. The social contract of our digital age is broken. Told the internet would connect, inform, and empower them, many feel manipulated, polarized, and desensitized instead.

I think there is an opportunity to build institutions, business models, and platforms on which credibility becomes a competitive advantage again. Obviously, organizations like this already exist. But new ones are also being built. To build a better internet, we need buy-in from three groups.

The first is those of us creating content. Whether podcasters and comedians or journalists and editors, those of us who want a business long term need to resist the urge to flatten everything into spectacle. Perhaps you want to become a supermarket tabloid, but that seems like a bad business to me. Find a path to create actual value, or suffer the consequences.

Second, social media platforms must admit that their recommendation systems are not neutral. They are the engines that build our reality. If you design them in ways that reward certainty, conflict, and outrage over accuracy, understanding, and context, you are building a worse world.

And last, those of us who love the internet must find ways to enjoy media while still retaining free will. Don't give away your agency entirely to algorithms. Choose for yourself what you want to pay attention to. We don't need to passively consume what we're fed.

I am not nostalgic for the old media world. It failed in lots of ways. But I also do not think the current version of digital media is permanent. We can build new things. Better things. We can build institutions that are native to the internet but not captive to its worst incentives.

Green is a YouTuber and co-founder of Complexly

ONLINE: JEAN-LOUIS ATLAN—SYGMA/GETTY IMAGES; BOLSONARO: VICTOR MORIYAMA—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES



The Risk Report

By Ian Bremmer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

IN RECENT YEARS, VOTERS ON both sides of the Atlantic have punished incumbents and establishment parties of both the left and right, in part because they reject politics as usual and perceptions of corruption. In the U.S., Europe, and South and Central America, familiar power brokers have taken a beating and a disparate group of mavericks—some on the left, others on the right—have emerged.

In Brazil, too, though two political giants have dominated the nation's politics, corruption is triggering fresh demand for change. In April 2018, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as Lula) went to prison on graft charges. He was released in November 2019, the country's Supreme Court annulled his conviction in 2021, and he toppled then President Jair Bolsonaro in the election of 2022. Bolsonaro is now serving a 27-month prison sentence for plotting a coup to overturn that result; since he's ineligible to win his old job back this October, his son Flávio, a sitting Senator, is now the lead challenger facing Lula. Latest polls show President Lula and Bolsonaro the younger running neck and neck.

But **corruption allegations have now returned to Brazil's center stage, reviving the possibility that voters on the right might turn to an outsider.** On May 13, Intercept Brasil, part of a U.S.-based online news outlet, published messages that appear to show Flávio Bolsonaro seeking money from Daniel Vorcaro, a central figure in Brazil's latest fraud case, to finance a movie about Bolsonaro the father. Film fundraising isn't illegal, but any direct link to Vorcaro undermines the Bolsonaro claim that President Lula is hopelessly corrupt.

That's why no one should assume that Lula and Flávio Bolsonaro are certain to meet in a second-round runoff for the top job. And it's not the only scandal. The Bolsonaro family has long been questioned about real estate acquisitions under financially suspicious circumstances for a price their official salaries would suggest they couldn't afford. Lula's own son, meanwhile, has been publicly linked to individuals arrested in a social-security fraud probe, and leaks related to a large anti-money-laundering and organized-crime investigation could implicate members of Lula's Cabinet.



Flávio Bolsonaro campaigns near São Paulo on May 15

There are also three third-party candidates in the race. Each remains a dark horse for now, but Lula's intense unpopularity with the right and the damaged Bolsonaro brand are creating space for a wild card. Romeu Zema, a businessman who built his political reputation as the popular governor of Minas Gerais state, leads the center-right NOVO party. Goiás Governor Ronaldo Caiado will represent the Social Democratic Party, and his reputation as a folksy crime fighter might play well with voters who like the elder Bolsonaro but have little confidence in his son. Antiestablishment activist Renan Santos, founder of the Free Brazil Movement, will lead the Mission Party as the plague-on-both-their-houses outsider candidate.

Zema and Santos have already spoken out on the latest accusations against Bolsonaro the son. Zema's hopes lie in his strong social media presence and his anticorruption reputation, while Caiado is a larger presence on television. None of them has yet seen a polling surge, and all must build effective campaigns to break through. Only in September will it become clear if any has a real shot to advance. In the final weeks of the campaign, voters on the right will judge whether any of them has a legitimate shot to beat Lula.

FOR NOW, LULA remains a (very) slight favorite, and Bolsonaro's biggest advantage is that the scandal broke five months before the vote. If it doesn't metastasize, he'll have time to shift the campaign's corruption focus back to Lula, and the U.S.-Iran fight for control of the Strait of Hormuz could cost the incumbent by sharply driving up food prices.

But prospects for a third-party breakthrough are higher than many think. Nearly 40% of Brazil's voters prefer a candidate not named Lula or Bolsonaro, both of whom have unpopularity ratings already approaching 50%. And this latest in Brazil's long line of political scandals raises the odds that a political outsider might actually win. ◻



In the Loop
By Tharin Pillay
EDITORIAL FELLOW

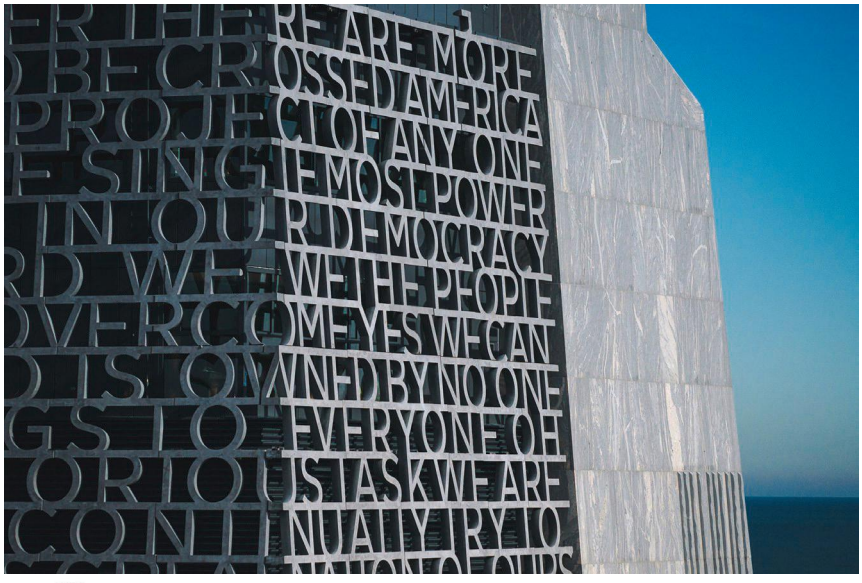
In April, a Gallup poll found that 18% of all U.S. employees believe it's at least somewhat likely that their jobs will be eliminated within the next five years because of AI or automation. For employees working in organizations that have adopted AI, the number rises to 23%. At the same time, AI use is growing steadily, with 28% of employees reporting they use AI a few times a week or more.

Economists disagree on how AI will impact labor markets, though early research from Stanford has found a decrease in employment concentrated among 22-to-25-year-olds in AI-exposed jobs, such as "software development, customer service, and clerical work."

But emerging evidence suggests that in some cases AI is substituting for critical thinking, rather than extending it. The implications of that for entry-level work are concerning. As Zana Buçinca, an incoming assistant professor at MIT who studies the design of human-AI interactions, explained: **expertise forms through effortful engagement. AI systems shortcut the need for that kind of engagement.** "So essentially, we're killing the path to become an expert, but also assuming that experts exist in the world and can operate these systems," she said.

Much of the debate around AI's labor impacts to date has focused on the technology itself: how quickly it advances and is adopted, and whether—unlike previous technologies—it will be able to occupy any new roles it creates. But the future of work also depends on what AI does to us—whether it is eroding the cognitive capacities on which the value of white collar work has historically depended.

For a twice-weekly deep dive into the AI revolution, sign up at **ti.me/InTheLoop**





The D.C. Brief
By Philip Elliott
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

BARACK OBAMA IS BACK TO MAKing headlines with long magazine profiles and going viral with carefully choreographed made-for-social-media videos. He's urging Democrats to stand up to an unpopular wartime President and raising boatloads of cash. He's encouraging his base to believe in big hope and change, while peddling must-have merch and tickets to his big events. No, you did not get in a time machine back to 2008. It's all happening. Again.

The 44th President is about to open his presidential campus—yes, it's more than just a library—and its dean is about to be as ubiquitous as if he were back on the ballot. But what is remarkable about the Return of Obama is not just the price tag—$850 million and counting for a conference center, a vegetable garden, and, yes, an NBA-regulation basketball court—or the physical size of his 19-acre complex on the South Side of Chicago. (It's not that big for a presidential center, Obama allies argue; George W. Bush's $250 million complex in Dallas clocks in at 23 acres, including 15 acres of wildflowers.) It's that **Obama's perch might be the last one to manifest in a way Americans have come to expect in a postpresidency footprint.**

President Donald Trump is already promoting a skyscraper in Miami that will house his post–White House presence. Concept art shows gold escalators, a decommissioned Air Force One, and Mar-a-Lago-style terraces that make it all seem more like a glitzy gathering spot for galas than a research hub for future scholars looking for primary-source documents.

Fundraising is under way for that project, as his inner circle understands that Trump's ability to raise cash might be at its peak as he sits in the Oval Office, ready to do deals to boost his ambitions for his presidential center, which could end up costing $1 billion.

'I didn't start off as President. I started off right down the street.'

—FORMER PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Detail from the Obama Presidential Library and Museum in Chicago

"I don't believe in building libraries or museums," Trump recently told reporters. "Could be [an] office, but it's most likely going to be a hotel with a beautiful building underneath and a 747 Air Force One in the lobby."

MEANWHILE, FORMER PRESIDENT Joe Biden remains in the very early stages of planting his sapling of a postpresidency in Delaware. (A city has yet to even be announced, let alone a site.) To say fundraising has been slow would be generous: Biden's advisers have aimed for $200 million for his building but ended last year with just $4 million, all of it transferred from a surplus Inauguration fund from 2020. Planners say they are gunning for an $11 million target by the end of next year, but around Washington, the thinking is that Biden might end up having to settle for a piece of a planned University of Delaware classroom project already named Biden Hall.

Most Presidents save the legacy-building cash grab for their second term, waiting a few months so as to give re-election donors a reprieve. Up until the summer of 2024, Biden thought he was heading into a re-election campaign that would give him plenty of time to hoover up dollars after his second Inauguration, in 2025. Instead, Biden became an annoyance to the Democratic Party, which found itself scrambling to assemble a 100-day sprint for Kamala Harris. Donors are not rushing to help the 83-year-old great-grandfather at this point.

Which is why historians may have to bookend the traditional concept of presidential libraries with Obama's by-the-books brick-and-mortar legacy defense. Doors are slated to open June 19, and tickets are already selling out into August.

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E. JASON WAMBSGANS—CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE/GETTY IMAGES



The Brief
By Jeffrey Kluger
EDITOR-AT-LARGE

LAST YEAR, THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development as part of cuts by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). A study in the *Lancet* estimated closing the agency—which provided food, medicine, clean water, and more to over 60 countries—could lead to 14 million deaths by 2030. Now, a paper in *Science* is pointing to another knock-on effect: a rise in violent conflict across the regions and communities the organization once served.

A rise in violent conflict in areas USAID no longer serves

"What happens is this sudden shock to projects, employment, livelihoods, and wages," says Austin Wright, professor of public policy at the University of Chicago and a lead researcher on the paper. "That drives up conflict by effectively creating economic chaos on the ground."

To explore what happens when crucial aid suddenly disappears, Wright and his colleagues surveyed 870 regions or communities that used to receive USAID services from March 2024—before Trump scrapped the program—until November 2025, around nine months after his move. The researchers used two datasets; one tracks global assistance programs, and the other tracks incidents of violence across the same areas. The researchers also tallied the amount of aid received by each of the regions studied.

The results were striking. On the whole, there was a 6.5% increase in the probability of conflict after aid was halted across the 870 regions, compared with other parts of the world with similar characteristics but that receive no aid. Protests and riots increased by 10%, incidents of armed fighting rose by 6.9%, and battle-related fatalities grew by 9.3%. **The uptick in violence began almost immediately after the aid stopped and remained elevated for months.** There was, says Wright, "a persistent change in the risk ecosystem."

The authors also looked into the severity of incidents—how many battles were waged in conflicts, for example. "That is actually increasing by more than 10%," Wright says. "So you're both more likely to be falling into war or conflict, and that conflict is going to be more severe." Regions that had been getting more aid experienced proportionally more violence than those formerly getting less or none.

As the U.S. alienates former global partners by stopping the program, China is attracting new friends and allies with its Belt and Road Initiative, building infrastructure in beneficiary nations. "We're not the only superpower trying to win favor," Wright says. "Once you shut down an organization like USAID, this creates a persistent concern about uncertainty in contracts."

There is no easy fix to the downstream problems caused by the shutdown of USAID. "You can't undo what DOGE has created," says Wright. "It's not as straightforward as simply turning the lights back on."

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ENVIRONMENT

The luna moth that saved me

BY KAI COGGIN

ON APRIL 25, 2024, I WAS WALKING IN THE OUACHITA National Forest with my wife and other master naturalists, studying mosses and searching for lady slipper orchids, when we noticed a luna moth on the tip of a dried-up flower stem, dangerously close to a mountain-bike trail. She was so still, I thought she was dead.

Luna moths are rare to see, especially during the day, because they are nocturnal creatures who navigate by the light of the moon. We gathered around in a moment of shared awe, then carried on.

On the way back to the car, I doubled back. The luna moth hadn't moved. As I looked closer, I saw a cluster of eggs. I broke the dried stem at the base and brought mama and her eggs into the car.

"It's for science," I told my wife.

By that afternoon, I had read everything I could find about the species. I placed the luna moth in a butterfly enclosure. She flapped her tattered wings once and moved closer to her eggs. The next morning, I found her on the floor, life cycle complete.

I didn't realize then that in saving this moth, I would also be saving a part of myself.

Adult luna moths live only about a week. They do not have digestive systems or working mouths. They do not eat. All the fuel they have as an adult comes from what they eat as caterpillars.

Luna moths are not pollinators, and have no beneficial mutualism with another species. Their only purpose is reproduction. And, perhaps, beauty.

I kept the cluster of eggs in Tupperware on the windowsill. It takes about 10 days for the eggs to hatch, and I kept vigil like a devoted monk. When a luna moth caterpillar hatches, it is smaller than a grain of rice. On May 5, I saw the tiniest green movement. Another. With a fine-haired paintbrush, I moved 44 newborn caterpillars into a jar stocked with sweet gum leaves.

Each day, I woke early, gathering leaves and taxiing the caterpillars to clean jars. I leaned into this meticulous work. Luna caterpillars molt into five instars, shedding their skin four times. Every four to 10 days, usually at night, the babies would slow and silk-anchor their bodies to a leaf so they could crawl out of their former selves, evacuating the exoskeletons that no longer fit them.

As the days and weeks passed, they outgrew the mason jars and the small monarch enclosure we had. We purchased a large butterfly habitat and tucked it into the corner of our greenhouse. Most mornings, you'd find me there on a footstool, tallying softly. The stockpile of leaves I gathered each morning was stripped overnight. They grew and grew. After almost a month of this meditation, the caterpillars were as thick as my forefinger.



Release of the fourth generation of moths on May 9, 2025

In their fifth and final instar, their green bodies turned rusty pink and they stopped eating to spin a tough cocoon of silk and leaves. I found 44 cocoons stuck all over the enclosure floor and walls, some swaying from twigs like hammocks.

Inside, the caterpillar transforms into a wriggling pupa. Signaled by warm temperatures, adult luna moths emerge within three to four weeks. On Juneteenth, by sunrise, five moths had eclosed, wings open and drying in the sunlight. I wept.

Starting on the summer solstice



COURTESY KAI COGGIN

and for many nights following, I opened the enclosure fluttering with pale green wings and reached inside to release each moth out into the moonlight. The majestic beings would sit on my hand, their wings would tremble, and they'd lift off toward the moon.

Invariably, before each night's release, a few lunas would get a little romantic, leaving dozens of eggs stuck inside the enclosure. Midwifing these creatures lasted much longer than anticipated. I raised five generations, releasing over 200 ambassadors of beauty into our forest.

For 16 months, I was dedicated to their protection. As the luna moths transformed, I did too. Something about the sustained close attention nourished an ache inside me, a place where my inner child finally had a prolonged practice in wonder, not just survival.

I SOFTENED IN THIS SLOWNESS, in gentle communion with another species. Indigenous ethnobotanist Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in *Braiding Sweetgrass* that "paying attention is a form of reciprocity with the living world, receiving the gifts with open eyes and open heart."

Observing them led me to see myself and better understand my own story. I had been in a cycle of survival mode, dissociation, and hypervigilance since I was a child. I don't have memories of my childhood in Bangkok before my parents divorced. My first memory is at age 7, looking up at my father in Houston as I hugged his pant leg goodbye. "Take care of your mother and sister for me," he said.

As the luna moths transformed, I did too

My mother will always be a hero to me. She was in survival mode too—a small but mighty Filipina single mom who was raised on a Calibungan rice farm, alone in America raising two young girls. She worked three jobs, and we were latchkey kids. There was always a roof over our heads and food on the table. She came to every marching-band contest, volleyball game, and swim meet.

There just wasn't much room for emotions, for talking about feelings, for being held in safety. It's cultural, perhaps. She worked hard so we could have a better life. She did her very best, and still does.

I didn't want to worry her, so I kept everything inside. The depression. The suicidal thoughts in fifth grade. The man who pushed himself inside me when I was 13. The guilt. The shame. The fact that I liked girls. I learned how to wear many masks, used sarcasm to make the pain funny, gained weight, and disappeared slowly.

College made it worse. Wannabe soldiers jolted me awake every morning in a cacophony of yelling. I was the only female drummer in university military band. Hazing was tradition. My junior year, I was expelled from the corps for violating the Don't ask, don't tell policy by fraternizing with a female cadet. I thought she loved me. After I was ousted, the generals made me march around the quad in full winter dress uniform to make an example of me in front of 2,000 cadets.

In my early 20s, I numbed myself from feeling. I built an inner world in which to hide, but I didn't let anyone inside—sometimes not even myself. I lit up only in the classroom, where I taught high school English.

At 28, I fell in love with a remarkable woman. We moved to Hot Springs, Ark., and made a beautiful life together. I paved my own path as a poet. I thought I had buried all that pain deep enough, but as they say in therapy circles, the body keeps the score. Finding the language of complex post-traumatic stress disorder gave me the intellectual capacity to begin the journey to healing, but the healing in my body came on the wings of a luna moth and her cluster of eggs. In the stillness of those mornings, my mind went quiet, my breath deepened, and something started to open. Curiosity and joy brought my inner child out of the most hidden corners of my psyche.

My therapist guided me through cognitive behavioral therapy, internal family systems, brainspotting, and bilateral sound stimulation that awakens hemispheres of the brain to create new neural pathways. And each time a luna moth shivered its wings, gearing up for flight from my fingertips, painful memories fell from my shoulders, telling me to keep flying toward illumination.

In protecting that singular luna moth and raising five generations of her lifeline, I re-mothered parts of myself that longed for that same softness.

Metamorphosis is a mysterious act, at once an unbecoming and becoming something else entirely.

Coggin is an arts educator, certified master naturalist, and the inaugural poet laureate of Hot Springs National Park

Having



PHOTOGRAPHS
BY ARIEL FISHER
FOR TIME

a Brawl



DANA WHITE AT UFC HEADQUARTERS IN LAS VEGAS ON MARCH 31

Dana White has built the UFC into a force so powerful that it's staging a fight at the White House

By Sean Gregory/ Las Vegas and Miami

Dana White marches in lockstep with President Donald Trump into a downtown Miami arena as the Kid Rock song "American Bad Ass" blares over the loudspeakers.



The longtime boss of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), dressed in his signature all-black attire, maintains a steely glare as Trump waves, shakes hands, and raises a fist, soaking in the adulation. Two American featherweights, Cub Swanson and Nate Landwehr, are kicking off the UFC 327 main card at the Kaseya Center on this mid-April Saturday night, and Trump snaps a photo with Swanson's wife Kenda and their three children—an 8-year-old daughter, Royal, and 7-year-old twin sons, King and Saint—by the Octagon.

Within minutes, Trump's Vice President, JD Vance, will tell the world that after 21 hours of talks in Islamabad, officials had failed to reach a deal to end the war with Iran. But this will not alter Trump's plans for the evening. A bona fide UFC buff, Trump settles into his cage-side seat next to White to view the fight on the bloodstained mat in front of them. Surrounded by, among others, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and several family members, Trump stares bluntly as Swanson and Landwehr go at it. Swanson's children, to the President's immediate left, do not. Royal buries her head in Kenda's armpit. Saint, on the verge of tears, covers his mouth with his hands. King clasps his head, ready to shield his eyes if need be. "I mean, look at this sh-t," White says to me. "Imagine being these little kids and seeing your dad do this."

In these moments, the brutal nature of mixed martial arts (MMA)—a sport involving a ruthless combination of punching, kicking, and grappling—isn't lost on White. He says one of his proudest achievements is that no one has died during a UFC competition. MMA was once considered so savage that at the turn of the century, unlike pornography and other controversial fare, it wasn't even carried on pay-per-view in many places. Now, the UFC is so mainstream that CBS, a network that on Saturday nights once aired *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman,* is showing Swanson club Landwehr's cranium with his right hand, knocking him out in the first round.

The crowd erupts. The kids are all smiles. Trump congratulates the Swanson family. And the surreal nature of what White has built sets in. The UFC packs arenas around the world, and the most powerful person on the planet, right beside White, is its promoter in chief. "What a scene," says White, 56. "There are some nights, I'll get up at the end and go, 'What the f-ck do I do for a living?'"

He's about to experience another such evening. On June 14, Flag Day and Trump's 80th birthday, the UFC is staging an event on the South Lawn of the White House, a spectacle that will also serve as the unofficial opening of a summerlong celebration of America's 250th anniversary. Dubbed UFC Freedom 250, the card features American Justin Gaethje taking on the UFC's second-ranked pound-for-pound fighter, Ilia Topuria of Georgia, in the main event. It also serves as a career capstone for White, whose clout is only growing both inside and outside the Octagon. White not only leads a $1.5 billion operation, he also played a key role in Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, introducing him at the 2024 Republican National Convention and helping him reach young male voters. Whether or not you admire White's unfiltered, profane leadership style, or his unapologetic embrace of the masculinity now synonymous with Trump's brand, you can't deny he's at the peak of his powers.

UFC Freedom 250 could very well bring more fans into his tent, even as critics question whether this is the moment for it. "Thank god they are focused on the priorities of all Americans," wrote California Governor Gavin Newsom on X after the White House touted the fight last September. Dissenters will shout louder as fight night inches closer, especially if the Iran war drags on and gas prices stay high. Plus, there are the optics: brawling at the home of the President risks coming across less as a tribute to America's fighting spirit than as a harkening back to the Roman gladiators' fighting to the death to entertain the emperor. A celebration of sanctioned violence in this milestone moment could, to some, symbolize American crass, not class.

Trump, however, has no such qualms. Why choose a UFC fight over all the other activities he could have hosted in his backyard to mark America's birthday? "Well, No. 1, I like it," he tells TIME, while sitting in a Kaseya Center backroom before the walkout. But also he has immense



▲ WHITE SAYS STAGING A FIGHT AT THE WHITE HOUSE IS PATRIOTIC, NOT POLITICAL

faith in White. "The job he's done is second to none. I've never seen anything like it."

In his quarter-century running the UFC, White has staged fights on five continents; several have drawn more than 50,000 attendees. But he's never faced expectations quite like this. Beyond variables like extreme weather that are out of his control, the logistical and security challenges are acute—especially in the wake of the shooting at the White House Correspondents' Dinner in April. D.C. will be on high alert, all eyes trained on White, but true to form, the man who despises showing frailty projects only confidence. "I don't sleep a lot, but it's not because I'm worried about anything," says White. "It's because my life is so f-cking awesome."

TRUMP AND WHITE have long had a mutually beneficial relationship. White moved to Las Vegas in 1995 because, in his telling, associates of notorious Boston mobster Whitey Bulger were attempting to extort him. He had lived in Sin City as a kid starting after fourth grade, when his single mother moved him and his sister there from New England, but had left to stay with relatives and finish high school in Maine because of his tumultuous relationship with his mom. After quitting his job as a Boston bellhop when he was around 19 and linking up with a local former Golden Gloves champion who taught him the boxing business, he returned.

He was working as a manager for a few fighters when he learned that the UFC, which was founded in 1993 with no weight classes and minimal rules, was on the verge of bankruptcy. He convinced an old high school classmate, Lorenzo Fertitta, and his older brother Frank, who had taken over their father's casino operation, that the MMA organization could thrive in a world where boxing was in disarray. White persuaded them to buy the UFC for $2 million in early 2001, and they installed him as president.

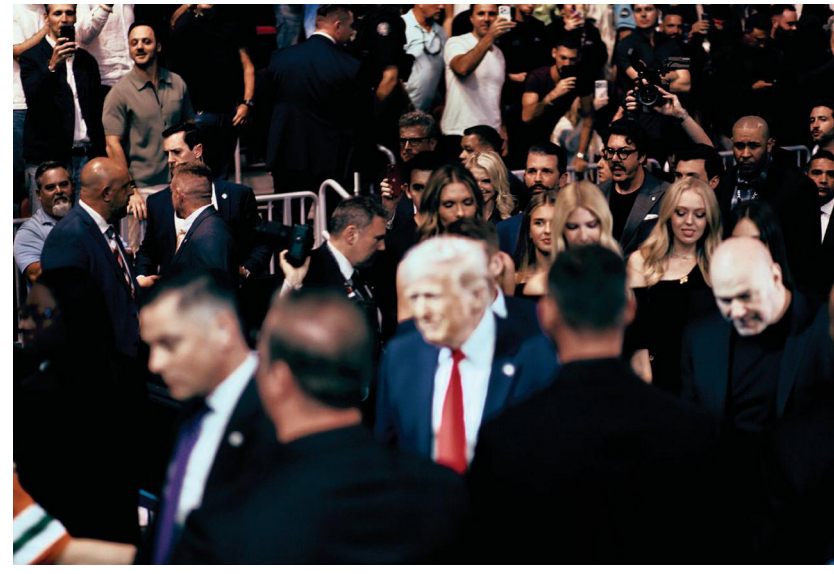
White's first fight in the role—UFC 30, in February 2001—was held at the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City, N.J. John McCain, the Republican Senator from Arizona, had famously labeled the UFC "human cockfighting," so it wasn't fashionable to take a chance on the organization. "That first night, I went home, I said, 'This is the most unbelievable thing I've ever seen,'" says Trump. "The punishment. You know, it's violent, but when I look at some of these other things, like the bare-knuckle stuff, it's not that [violent]."

The UFC remained on shaky footing until 2005, when *The Ultimate Fighter*—a reality show featuring contenders battling for a spot on the circuit—became a hit on Spike TV. "It was our Trojan horse to get on television," says White, whose show launched the year after *The Apprentice*. (White says he didn't watch.) But it was a slow burn. "Dana and I would fly around to all these crazy just mom-and-pop sort of sponsorships," says Craig Piligian, a former *Survivor* producer who helped White create the program. "I remember going to Vermont, going everywhere with him, and we just could not get $1."

As the UFC grew, Trump sent White occasional notes of encouragement. UFC fighters like Chuck Liddell, Conor McGregor, and Ronda Rousey became household names. In 2016, WME-IMG, the talent-management and entertainment conglomerate run by Hollywood

superagent Ari Emanuel, led a group that bought the UFC for $4 billion, further scaling White's business. "All we needed Dana to do—and this is not a simple thing, this is the meat of it—is put on the best fights in the world and really know how to promote them and make the proper matchups," says Emanuel. "And so that part we knew we had, as long as he remained with us. Then we could do everything else." White, who by this time had a 9% stake in the UFC, made some $360 million in the deal.

That same year Trump asked White to talk at the Republican National Convention. "He's a very good speaker, very inspirational-type speaker," says Trump. "I know guys who are successful, they can't speak." White's circle advised him to turn Trump down. "Everybody said, 'Don't do it. Don't do it,'" says White. "It was about more than 'You don't want to get into politics.' The bigger one was 'He's never gonna win.' And I was like, 'Well, whether he wins or not, the guy's been a good friend to me.'"



PRESIDENT TRUMP AND WHITE, RIGHT, ENTER THE KASEYA CENTER IN MIAMI FOR UFC 327

When COVID hit, White continued to stage events in Las Vegas and Florida during the shutdown. In the summer of 2020, the UFC secured a facility in Abu Dhabi, named Fight Island, to host bouts in a bubble. No one got seriously ill there, and with the UFC practically the only league offering programming, even more fans flocked to the sport. "That's the bedrock of who he is," says Mark Shapiro, who was at the time president of Endeavor, the new name for WME-IMG. "You tell him he can't do something, and the game is on." Pedro Rodriguez, a 22-year-old fan from Miami, started following the UFC during this period. "Dana was the first one to go against the system," he says. In February 2021, Endeavor bought a 100% stake in the UFC: it merged the UFC and WWE and took a new company, TKO Group Holdings, public in September 2023.

After the UFC announced it had signed a sponsorship deal with Bud Light that fall, critics on the right hammered White. At the time, many conservatives were rebelling against Bud Light for partnering with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney on a customized beer can. White appealed to Trump, making the case that Anheuser-Busch wasn't some woke company, but in fact a staunch supporter of first responders, military families, and farmers. In a February 2024 Truth Social post, Trump parroted many of White's talking points. "Anheuser-Busch is a Great American Brand that perhaps deserves a Second Chance?" Trump wrote. The blowback subsided. "I think I'd support him for anything," says Trump now. "Smart guy, very smart guy, and he's going to do the right thing."

Going into the 2024 election, White helped broker appearances for Trump on shows popular with young men, connecting him with the Nelk Boys; Will Compton and Taylor Lewan of *Bussin' With the Boys;* Adin Ross; Theo Von. "I had this philosophy that if he stayed on Fox News, he couldn't win the election," says White. How significant was White to the campaign? "Very important," Trump says. "He introduced me to people I never heard of, young kids. I mean, I was being interviewed by 20-year-old kids. I'm saying, 'Where the hell did you meet these people?' They're called influencers. But I did a lot. I became friendly with some of them. They're nice kids, and they do have a big audience, and everything helps."

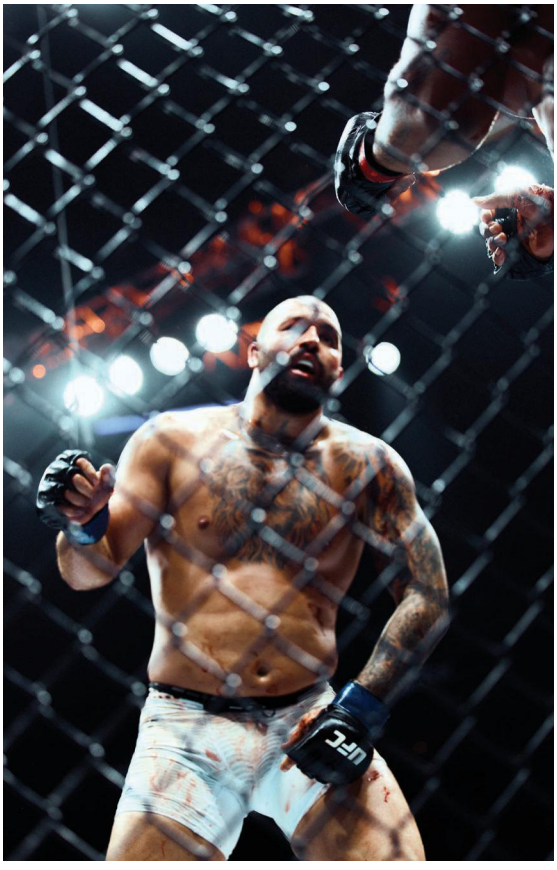
Then White caught the big kahuna. For eight years, he had been asking Joe Rogan, who's been calling UFC bouts since 2002, to have Trump guest on his wildly influential podcast. Finally, Rogan relented: Trump spent three hours with Rogan in October 2024, a conversation that now has more than 62 million views on YouTube. Rogan offered Kamala Harris a slot too. Harris later said she regretted passing.

While on a flight to Mar-a-Lago the day before the election, White says he was "blowing up" Rogan's phone, trying to get him to publicly endorse Trump. "I was grinding on that thing right down to the last minute," he says. That night, at a rally in Pittsburgh, Trump announced the news: Rogan had backed him. During his election-night victory celebration, Trump called White to the podium. "Dana! Dana! Dana!" Trump's supporters yelled.

> 'The job he's done is second to none. I've never seen anything like it.'
>
> —PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

In August 2025, Paramount—which days before had closed its merger with Skydance, the media company founded by David Ellison—bought the UFC's media rights for $7.7 billion over seven years. The deal effectively doubled the average annual price ESPN had been paying for UFC rights and eliminated the pay-per-view model from UFC fights. It also gave UFC fights entrée onto CBS, a Paramount subsidiary.

White doesn't believe Ellison's friendly



HEAVYWEIGHT JOSH HOKIT WAS ADDED TO THE WHITE HOUSE CARD AFTER HIS UFC 327 WIN



WHITE GOES THROUGH PLANS FOR UFC FREEDOM 250 AT UFC HEADQUARTERS

relationship with Trump factored into the deal. According to analyst Peter Supino, who covers TKO for Wolfe Research, Paramount's offer beat Wall Street expectations by some 20%. UFC revenues reached $401 million during the first quarter of 2026—a 12% increase over the same period last year. Over the past 30-plus months, TKO shares are up more than 85%.

THE DECOR IN WHITE'S SPACIOUS OFFICE at UFC headquarters in Las Vegas is, well, striking. There's an X-rated Japanese photograph, and samurai swords from the 1600s rest on a coffee table. There's an encased AK-47 and a grenade in another area; in the magazine of the assault rifle, which is wrapped in $1 bills, are items humans kill for, such as cocaine, diamonds, and gold. Across the room are two pistols. One barrel is cloaked in a red bible cover, the other in a black one. "Those two books have killed more people than any handgun ever made," says White. "I am very antireligion."

Cigars, guitars, sports memorabilia: they're all there. "I am unapologetically masculine," White says. Men, in White's mind, never split the bill when out to dinner with a woman. Men don't shirk family responsibilities. And they never, ever, vocalize their mental-health struggles. "Talking about it publicly, I just feel like it opens the door to make young men think that it's OK to just f-cking go, 'Oh, I'm having mental [health issues],'" White says in a mock whiny voice. "Handle it behind closed doors. Don't show that weakness to anybody."

And don't call any of this talk toxic. "What is toxic masculinity?" says White. "Who has it? Who's too masculine?" I suggest that when this attitude begets unjustified violence, you can call it toxic, no? "Then you're a douchebag," says White. "There's a difference between being a douchebag and being masculine."

(On New Year's Eve 2022, White and his wife Anne were caught on video slapping each other during an altercation. Both expressed contrition about the incident. "It's just one of those things where you have to look at yourself and blame nobody but you," says White. "How the f-ck did that happen? And how do we make sure that never happens again?")

If White's worldview has spread during Trump's second term—in March 2025, the New York *Times* wrote that White "has helped define a new, masculinist American mainstream"—and if the White House fight signals its crescendo, that's fine by him. "There's nothing I hate worse than men that don't act like men," says White. "So if that puts me in the manosphere, then I guess I'm in."

Last year, even some conservative pundits felt White waded too deep into this space. White warmly greeted the controversial Tate brothers, Andrew and Tristan, at an event in Las Vegas for Power Slap—another combat-sports offering, founded by White in 2022, involving one person striking their defenseless opponent with all their might. The Tates, online influencers who are facing human-trafficking charges in Romania and rape and human-trafficking charges in the U.K., are known for promoting misogynistic views. (They've denied all allegations against them.) White swears he disagrees with their most noxious statements. But he doesn't regret the exchange. "I have no beef with those guys," says White. "They showed up to a fight. I said hi. It's not like I have any type of relationship [with them]." The brothers also attended UFC 327, as well as UFC 328 in Newark, N.J., in May, though White says he did not interact with them at either event.

White also has ties to the MAHA (Make America Healthy Again) movement, whose collection of "biohacking bros" promoting alternative remedies, antiaging methods, and vaccine skepticism often intersects with the manosphere. "Love him," White says of Health and Human Services

Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. "I feel he's on the right side of things." White turned his back on conventional medicine coming out of the COVID pandemic, and in 2022 he began working with Gary Brecka, a popular wellness influencer. Brecka, who is not a doctor, put White on a regimen of supplements, cold plunges, IV drips, and red-light therapy that has left him feeling leaner, more energized, and no longer suffering from sleep apnea. "This is what changed my life," says White. "Go strap that CPAP machine on your fat face and good luck. I wish you all the best."

If his language sounds uncouth, it has hardly hindered his ascent. In January 2025 he was elected to Meta's board, where he is a strong advocate for free speech. That same month Meta founder, CEO, and chairman Mark Zuckerberg praised "masculine energy" on Rogan's podcast, saying that "having a culture that, like, celebrates the aggression a bit more has its own merits that are really positive." White admires Zuckerberg's smarts, competitive instincts, and ability to run a full day of meetings on time. He puts Zuckerberg in the same category of alpha role models as Trump, Carl Icahn, and Michael Jordan. "What I didn't realize about Mark until I got on the board," White says, "is Zuckerberg might be one of the biggest killers in the history of killers." (Meta did not comment for this story.)

AT THE KASEYA CENTER the evening before UFC 327, White expressed concern that his team's plan to pin down the President the next day to show him logistical plans for the White House event would be a fool's errand. "He doesn't have the patience or the attention span to do this here," says White. "I can't see this happening." But on fight night, the President does listen to White and two UFC officials in the backroom, as they show him slides on a laptop. Though a pair of TVs, one airing Fox News, the other one the evening's preliminary bouts—featuring American welterweight Kevin Holland—do occasionally distract him. "Now if I wanted to heavy train, because I'm a very good athlete, could I beat the sh-t out of him?" Trump asks White, to laughter in the room. "Or would you stop me from trying?"

"I would stop you, sir," White replies.

The UFC group details the seating arrangements for Trump's Marine Band, the media, and the military personnel. At least 1,200 of the approximately 4,300 seats will go to active military members. The White House, TKO, and the UFC will divvy up the rest: White has invited Adam Sandler, Guy Ritchie, Tom Brady, Jared Leto, Jason Statham, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, and Mario Lopez.

"How many are you going to have at the Ellipse?" the President asks. The park across from the White House is hosting a viewing party for the fights and a fan fest, highlighted by a performance by the Zac Brown Band, the night before. White tells Trump the Ellipse can hold up to 85,000 people. Tickets to all the events are free but require registration; guests who attend the South Lawn fight will also need to show ID.

"Voter ID," Trump quips. "Can you believe, no voter ID? Yet these guys, these dopey guys, if you want to get in to see Democrats, you need 15 forms of ID. It's just, they want to cheat."

White swore off politics after the 2024 presidential campaign. But, I ask him, isn't bringing your business to the White House an inherently political act? "You can make anything political if you want to," says White. "I love this country like anybody on the left loves this country. I love this country like anybody on the right loves this country. This is basically me spending a sh-tload of money to celebrate the 250th birthday of America, with America and the rest of the world."



> 'There's nothing I hate worse than men that don't act like men.'
>
> —DANA WHITE

Trump planted the seeds for UFC 250, leaning over to White at the 2024 Madison Square Garden fight 11 days after his re-election and suggesting a White House card. In February 2025, calls between the Administration and the UFC officially commenced. UFC staffers have made more than a dozen planning visits to D.C. in the past three months; the organization is installing temporary seats on the South Lawn and will have to foot the bill for damaged grass. The UFC will bring in an 87-ft. canopy to light the Octagon, more than double the height of a typical UFC grid. White insisted on the extra room to ensure that nothing obstructs the White House TV shot.

White says the UFC will lose approximately $30 million on the event. "This is the greatest earned marketing tool of all time," says Shapiro, now president and COO of TKO. "It's a



WHITE HAS MULTIPLE WEAPONS ON DISPLAY IN HIS LAS VEGAS OFFICE

once-in-a-generation moment. The kind of attention, awareness, and sampling we're going to get from audiences around the world, on that day alone, will be more than we could get in an entire year."

It's still a gamble. While the canopy should protect the fighters and many spectators from rain, lightning within eight miles of the South Lawn requires a 30-minute evacuation. Persistent strikes could wipe out the event. The UFC will rely on a pair of weather services, one run by the military, for forecasts beginning 10 days before the fight. Starting a week in advance, they'll receive hourly updates.

Strange as it may sound, White talks about insects several times in our conversations. The UFC has had only one outdoor fight in its history, in Abu Dhabi in 2010, and it was humid and apparently buggy. "Imagine fighting and you got bugs flying in your mouth or in your nose," says White. But at least one fighter seems unfazed. "There could be a snake in the middle of that cage. I won't even see it," says Gaethje. "Whatever bug bites me will bite him."

The fight will feature other quirks, including, surprisingly enough, the national anthem. Out of respect to the international composition of the UFC's fighters and its host countries—bouts have already been held in England, Australia, and Mexico this year, and cards in Macao, Azerbaijan, and Serbia are on the 2026 schedule—White doesn't play "The Star-Spangled Banner," or any country's anthem, at UFC bouts. An exception will be made at the White House.

Fighters will warm up in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and shower back at their hotels. The main-event competitors are set to walk out from the Oval Office. And while most fans will not enjoy access to West Wing restrooms, White is promising high-class temporary facilities for the 4,000-plus spectators. "We're bringing in real bathrooms," he says.

When the White House fight lineup was released in March, some UFC fans complained that the card lacked real star power. Where was McGregor? (He's wasn't ready for the D.C. card and will fight at UFC 329 on July 11.) What about Jon "Bones" Jones? "I have to build a card of people that I'm confident in and I believe will show up to the fight," says White. "And Jon Jones is the least dependable guy that you could ever know." (Jones has pulled out of several scheduled bouts over the years; he has said he was "lowballed" in White House fight negotiations.) Analysts cite a dearth of superstar fighters as an ongoing business concern. White stands by the lineup, arguing the emerging athletes at the White House could break out. He did make one change at Trump's suggestion, however. In Miami, Trump wondered why American heavyweight Derrick Lewis, a fan favorite, wasn't on the card. White immediately added Lewis and matched him with fellow American Josh Hokit. While Hokit's heel act can wear thin, his thrilling victory at UFC 327 won the respect of hardcore fans.

No women are fighting at the White House. White says he wanted to set a title bout between Zhang Weili of China and Mackenzie Dern, the American-Brazilian fighter. A Chinese athlete would increase the international audience of the card, which also includes fighters from Brazil, France, and Canada. But according to White, Zhang is taking time off from fighting. "We did try to make a women's fight," says White. "We couldn't get it done." (A representative for Zhang did not respond to requests for comment.)

Even staunch UFC supporters have wondered if the White House hype is worth it. Rogan, who will be in D.C. calling the fight, referred to it as a "gimmick" on his podcast. "At first I thought, 'That's not nice,'" says Trump. "And then I realized, it is a gimmick. Life is a gimmick, if you think about it, right? But it's a good gimmick. It's something that will never happen again. Nobody will ever have the privilege of doing something like this in front of the White House. It's going to be very unique. It's going to be amazing. I think it's great for America, frankly."

More than four hours later, past 12:30 a.m., Trump has left the premises, and White has concluded his post-card press conference. As White works his way through the bowels of the arena, UFC Freedom 250, still more than two months away, is front of mind. "Now we go in and start building all the bells and whistles," he says. "We've got to get it all dialed in, and then we have to execute that night. We're putting on the most historic sporting event in history, and now we have to deliver. We will absolutely, positively deliver." —*With reporting by* SIMMONE SHAH

POLITICS

The Insurgent

GRAHAM PLATNER'S CONTROVERSIAL RISE

BY JULIA TERRUSO/SULLIVAN, MAINE

GRAHAM PLATNER IS SITTING DOWN FOR A BITE between campaign events in his dining room overlooking Frenchman Bay, the scenic Down East waterway where he once farmed oysters, and more recently takes reporters on boat rides to talk about his unexpected political ascent. Sun streams into the room, which is decorated with family photos and wooden Easter eggs painted pastel shades. Suddenly Platner's black Lab, Zevon (named after rock star Warren), lunges at the tinfoil-wrapped breakfast sandwich on the table. Platner sticks his hand into the dog's mouth to wrestle it away.

"Hey! That's not great for you, you f-cking idiot," Platner says. His hand is bleeding, but he doesn't stop talking. "Very few people get an opportunity in life to do something really big about things they really, really care about," he tells me. "And for some weird accident of history, that opportunity arose, and here I am."

Platner's story feels a lot like a pat movie plot: With Democratic voters yearning for outsiders to shake up the system, along comes a rough-hewn, gravelly voiced Marine Corps veteran from Sullivan, Maine—pop. 1,300—as their new national star. He barnstorms the state with

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRETA RYBUS FOR TIME



Platner, wearing his Easter lily pin, outside his home in Sullivan

a pugilistic brand of economic populism, building a following so quickly that he forces his central-casting opponent, the two-term Democratic governor, Janet Mills, out of the race before voters can cast a ballot. Even in this antiestablishment, unabashedly ageist political moment, Platner's rise has been remarkable. Yes, Mills is 78. She's also a lifelong Mainer who served as a state attorney general and DA, went toe-to-toe with President Donald Trump, and was the handpicked Senate recruit of national Democratic leaders. Platner, 41, is a newcomer carrying enough baggage to sink an oyster boat: a Nazi tattoo, a DUI from a post-military period of heavy drinking, and a trove of Reddit posts that spewed hostility in almost every direction. Working-class candidates are having a moment—but surely, many Democrats lament, the party could have found one who hadn't, for example, defended peeing on dead Taliban fighters, or joked about the Virgin Mary being a "skank."

Voters gravitated toward Platner anyway. After decades of nominating buttoned-up technocrats with glittering résumés, many Democrats want candidates with flaws, faded ink, and redemption arcs that resemble their own. Platner's past, in other words, may actually be his path. "Platner's rise fits a moment where many Democrats feel the traditional playbook hasn't worked, either politically or personally," says admaker Jim Margolis, who advised Barack Obama's presidential campaigns. "Democrats are willing to bet on someone who may have a few warts but feels fresh, unscripted, and tuned in. His 'difference' may well be his secret sauce."

The test will come in November, when Platner squares off against the five-term Republican incumbent, Susan Collins, with control of the Senate on the line and his controversies dominating the airwaves. A victory could change the kinds of candidates Democrats recruit for public office for years to come, especially as millennials with problematic online footprints hit middle age. Platner's candidacy is forcing the party to come to terms with what it's willing to risk in exchange for a fighter. "People don't want cowards who are, like, trying to find this moderate message, to find this mythical center," Platner says as we ride in his truck to a town hall in Orono. "We are in a form of class war. And if the Democratic Party is going to have a future with working people, it needs to pick the side of working people."

ON A BLUE-SKY MORNING in April, Platner arrives at the Ellsworth Public Library, a quaint white-columned colonial 15 minutes from his home. Across Maine, he has been working rooms 10 times this size. But as he greets the group of wrinkled and familiar faces, he is overtaken by emotion.

"It's really important to me that I come from this community," Platner tells them, his voice faltering. The crowd gives him a moment to collect himself before a thick Maine accent breaks the silence: "Get a hankie, Graham!" a woman calls out.

"F-ck off," he says tenderly.

Platner was raised and rebuilt his life nearby, taking over a family friend's small oyster farm in 2019 and later joining the Sullivan planning board and becoming harbormaster of the bay. He lives in a modest two-story house, paid for by a loan from his father, its porch stacked with fishing equipment, just three doors down from his childhood home. "A lot of friends of mine, their dads were fishermen or independent contractors, clamdiggers, people just figuring it out," Platner tells me. "But they made it work, and they grew up in decent houses. They raised families, and their kids went to college. Today, those kids who are now my age can't afford a home in this part of the state."

Platner may project the kind of blue collar voice Democrats have rarely nominated of late. But his opponents have sought to highlight his family's money to discredit this working-class image. His grandfather was a celebrated architect who designed the original Windows on the World restaurant and iconic modernist furniture. His father was a lawyer, and his mother owns a successful restaurant in town. Platner briefly attended the elite Hotchkiss School in Connecticut. "I absolutely hated it, because I was surrounded by, frankly, rich kids," Platner says. "It was a world I did not understand." He transferred to a prep school in Bangor, where he captained the wrestling team and acted in community-theater productions. Republican groups have also noted that Platner lives off his disabled veterans' assistance checks—he gets free health care and $4,800 per month for injuries connected to his service, including herniated discs and posttraumatic stress disorder—and doesn't collect a salary as an oyster farmer.



Platner wanted to join the military from a young age. By 3, he was wearing his great-grandfather's World War I helmet around the house, his mother recalls. As a teenager, he became a World War II buff and a skeptic of U.S. military adventurism. His superlative in his high school yearbook was "Most Likely to Start a Revolution." In 2002, two years before he'd enlist to fight in the war in Iraq, he protested President George W. Bush's plans for it during a visit to the local airport.

Platner went on to serve three tours there as a Marine infantryman, engaging in close combat in Ramadi and Fallujah. "Infantry units have very different versions of value sets and virtues than the regular world," Platner says. "Literally, it is our job to kill people." He enrolled at George Washington University in D.C., but struggled to adjust and decided to



Platner hosts a campaign event at the public library in Ellsworth

re-enlist in the Army. On a fourth tour, this time in Afghanistan with the Army National Guard, he led a rifle squad in the Ghorband District, training Afghan police. "I go back to Afghanistan in 2010 firmly believing that I'm part of, like, a new Army, that we're gonna do it differently. And we did absolutely f-cking nothing differently," he says. All military brass wanted to know, he recalls, was: "How many foot patrols? How many enemy killed?"

In 2007, while on leave, Platner and some fellow Marines were drunk in Split, Croatia, when they decided to get matching tattoos, he says. Platner has said they agreed on a skull and crossbones because they thought the image looked tough. It also bore a close resemblance to the *totenkopf,* an insignia adopted by the Nazi SS that is still associated with white supremacist and neo-Nazi hate groups.

When Platner knew this is a matter of dispute. An anonymous acquaintance told *Jewish Insider* that Platner was aware of the tattoo's meaning years before it became national news; the source alleged that in a 2012 exchange, Platner referred to it as "my *totenkopf.*" Platner's former political director, Genevieve McDonald, told the Bangor *Daily News* last October that Platner had informed her in August that he had a tattoo that could be problematic. (She resigned before it became public.) McDonald declined to speak to TIME, but has said it was far-fetched for someone well-versed in military history to not know the meaning of the symbol.

Platner was forced to declare that he was "not a secret Nazi." He maintains he was unaware of the tattoo's meaning until October 2025, and promptly had it covered up. "I took my shirt off in front of my Jewish family for 17 years," Platner says. (His sister-in-law and a stepbrother are Jewish.) "If I thought that I had some obvious symbol associated with Nazism, I would not have done that." He notes that when he went to work on a security team defending the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, he had to go through a full-body screening for gang and hate tattoos—implying that military brass missed the connection too.

But for those worried about the tattoo, Platner—an outspoken critic of Israel—compounded concerns by amplifying a post by a notorious antisemite on social media and appearing on a podcast with a different antisemitic conspiracy theorist. "I don't know that means he's gonna lose," says Matt Bennett of Third Way, a centrist Democratic organization that backed Mills. "But I do wish we could be talking about something other than what this guy wrote on Reddit and wrote on his body."

LESLIE HARLOW, Platner's mother, recalls picking her son up from his final deployment and being struck by all the families waiting in a North Carolina parking lot without anyone from the government or the military to greet them. "We have delivered these children to you guys. There were no weapons of mass destruction. You are now sending these people home, and we just have to go to Hooters and get a hamburger?" she says. "I found it really symbolic of how we treat families that have sacrificed their children."

Platner returned to Maine depressed, drinking too much, and suffering from PTSD. It was during this period that he wrote many of the 1,800 posts he authored on Reddit under the alias "P-Hustle." Many of them are angry and offensive. In 2013, he argued women shouldn't get too drunk if they were worried about sexual assault. That same year, Platner—who did a stint as a Capitol Hill bartender—asked why Black people "don't tip." He used a homophobic slur in 2018, agreed cops were "bastards" in 2020, and described himself as a "communist" in 2021.

When these comments emerged in mid-October, staff members fled; the campaign appeared on the verge of implosion. Instead, Platner's fundraising improved, more volunteers signed on, and he kept climbing in polls. When I asked Platner's mom about that surge, she was unsurprised, noting the disconnect between the national backlash and response from Maine voters. "I'm hopeful that Graham's honesty and his willingness to be so clear about his own struggles can be better understood by the American people," Harlow says. "I'm also very headstrong about what people here in Maine want."

At a town hall on the University of Maine campus, I watched Platner give his stump speech to a packed audience before taking questions. A female

veteran and social worker told Platner she was a supporter, but works with sexual-assault victims who remain skeptical given his past comments. She asked him how he would convince voters on the fence. Platner called himself a "moron" with "blinders on" who didn't previously understand the epidemic of sexual assault. "To those who are still worrying, I get it," he said. He promised to push for better protections against sexual abuse in the military if he's elected. Then he got to what has become the thesis of his campaign: "If you believe in transformational politics, which I do," he said, "you have to believe in the ability of people to transform." The crowd gave him the loudest response of the evening; several dozen stood to applaud.

PLATNER IS SITTING on a tree stump in a field adjacent to his house, posing for photos, when a campaign staffer named Ryan Barto notices the pin on his lapel. "What is that?" Barto asks.

Platner doesn't respond at first. "It's an Easter lily," he explains, a little reluctantly, anticipating what's coming. "These are all over Boston right now."

The flower, often worn during Easter, is a symbol of remembrance for Irish republican combatants who died in the 1916 Easter Rising. In Northern Ireland, it's a more divisive symbol of support for the provisional IRA, which quickly becomes clear to the staffers furiously googling. Barto suggests Platner lose the pin for the pictures. "Let's elect you first, then we can work on Irish independence," he jokes.

"I'm not taking it off," Platner replies. "A discussion of whether there should be a free and independent Ireland is absolutely a discussion I'd have." When he covered up the *totenkopf,* he chose a Celtic knot.

Platner's campaign has been, at times, a tussle between the candidate and the tacticians trying to package him. One morning last July, Daniel Moraff, a progressive strategist who recruited the mechanic and U.S. Navy veteran Dan Osborn to run for Senate in Nebraska, drove to Platner's house unannounced. Moraff had seen video of Platner rallying against a proposed Norwegian salmon farm in Frenchman Bay, arguing that it would devastate the local ecosystem. He wanted to pitch Platner on running for Senate.

Platner says he was ambivalent at first. He'd been working as an organizer for several years with the grassroots Democratic group Acadia Action, protesting the Trump Administration and helping the homeless. He says he had considered running for state legislature someday. The Senate wasn't on his radar. But when Moraff came back to him with a fundraising plan and an idea for a first ad, Platner decided to go for it.

"Not a lot of U.S. Senate candidates set out to run their campaigns like community-organizing projects," Moraff says. When I joined Platner for three days in April, he was doing three or four events a day, from a crowd of 1,000 to coffee with a Trump supporter—a conversation the campaign would clip into a social media video. Platner says he writes his own speeches, which pinball from the New Deal to *Apocalypse Now.* In interviews he sounds blunt and unrehearsed. But what stands out to his supporters is a fluency for the anxieties of the moment and his ability to connect with the hurt underneath them. When Platner talks about higher wages and better health care, he frames them as ways to give people more time for family, for community, for the things that make life feel fuller. He talks about isolation and loneliness and how they allow divisions to harden.

In a middle-school cafetorium in Augusta, I watched Platner move 55-year-old Eric Stevens, a Democrat who works at a car dealership, to tears as he spoke about the need for connection. Alex Poliakoff, an 82-year-old retired Air Force pilot, called him authentic: "He appeals to the Maine population who say, 'We want to change, and we'll take a chance.'" In Orono, Jim Pardilla, a dishwasher from Old Town, called Platner "crotchety, old Down East"—

'I wouldn't have married him if he didn't learn from his mistakes.'

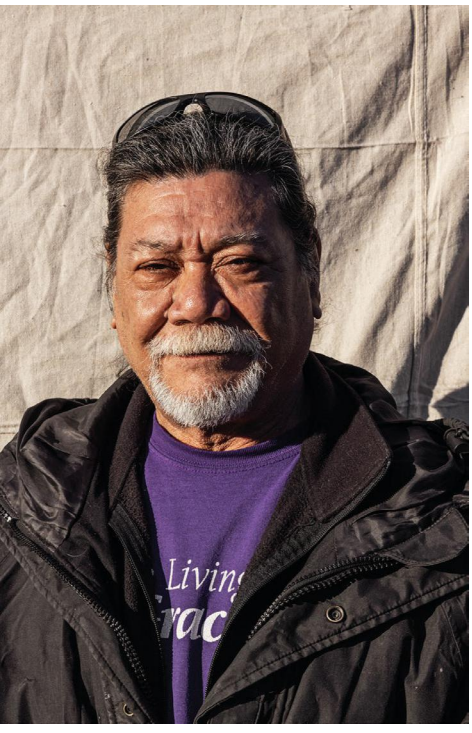
—AMY GERTNER, PLATNER'S WIFE



and meant it as a compliment. Bobby O'Brien, a 77-year-old event planner in Ellsworth, praised his focus on the next generation: "What chance are they going to have?"

Instead of dwelling on Trump, Platner speaks about the billionaires dominating the political system. He has a relationship with Senator Bernie Sanders and wants to bolster the chamber's populist bloc. He argues that if Democrats don't pass policies that improve people's lives, they could lose working-class voters forever. "My biggest fear is if Democrats ride a wave of anti-Trump sentiment back into power, but do it with people who don't have an interest in showing up for a fight and making change," he says. "They may never give us another chance, and the next wave of right-wing fascism could be far worse."

Platner supports packing the Supreme Court, scrapping the filibuster, enacting Medicare for All, and banning congressional stock trading. He gets in the weeds on issues he cares about, like commercial-fishing regulations. Platner deviates from his party on guns—he owns AR-15s and opposes a federal assault-weapons ban—and has little regard for Democratic leaders. He wants to jettison Chuck Schumer, 75, as the top Senate Democrat and floats four possible replacements: Senators Chris Van Hollen, Mark Kelly, Chris Murphy, or Brian Schatz. He boasts he would





From left: campaign volunteer Lydia Hart, and supporters Jim Pardilla and Bobby O'Brien

bring a savvy the caucus lacks. "I was a bartender on Capitol Hill. I got these people drunk for years. It's fascinating to realize just how bad at politics people actually are," he says. "A lesson of this that has been terrifying but also reassuring: We can beat them, and we understand politics better than they do."

But there's a reason Collins, the last Republican Senator from New England, is a five-term incumbent. Democrats have had her on the ropes before: Democrat Sara Gideon was up on Collins in several polls in 2020, only to lose by 9 points. While Platner leads in some early surveys, to close the deal he will need to explain how he'll fill the shoes of someone who has time and again delivered funds for Maine as chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Wary Democrats whisper that Platner's past could hold more controversies. Adam Lee, a Mills supporter who owns a chain of car dealerships in Maine, says he will vote for the presumptive Democratic nominee reluctantly. "He has electrified people," Lee admits. But "there are things he said that are really not OK."

Platner is trying to make amends. He has told people across Maine how ashamed he is of past comments. He held a Passover seder with supporters this spring. He also contends there's hypocrisy embedded in the criticism. "We have a society that very much glorifies military service. But then the moment we have to talk about the realities of it, everybody's like, 'That's offensive,'" he complains. "I mean, I get f-cking asked about the tattoo every single time."

AMY GERTNER, Platner's wife, was sitting on her small back deck in mid-April, passing out treats to her dogs. A former middle-school art teacher, Gertner was five weeks pregnant. She and her husband have been open about their difficult path to start a family, sharing that they journeyed to Norway because IVF was cheaper there than in the U.S. The couple has done two embryo transfers this year while juggling a Senate campaign, part of which has focused on a promise to improve access to health care and fertility treatments.

All campaigns are a bundle of unknowns. For Gertner, this one also involves added hormones, medical appointments, and the national spotlight. "I have teenage moments where I kick and scream and yell and I say that this is unfair, and then I get it out of my system," says Gertner, 40. "We knew that he needed to do this."

A few days after we spoke, Gertner miscarried. Platner raced home from a town hall to be with her. They spent a few days binge-watching TV and learning guitar. They also put out a short statement about their loss. "I never planned on talking about any of this," Gertner tells me in a recent phone call. "But from the time we started sharing, people were telling us that our public story was offering hope. It's really isolating going through the health care system in general, and then it's extra isolating going through it as a woman trying to conceive." The raw vulnerability is a sharp departure from the sanitized way politics has long been practiced.

Gertner gets frustrated with the portrayals of her husband. "I wouldn't have married Graham if he hadn't gone to therapy. I wouldn't have married him if he didn't learn from his mistakes," she says. She describes him as an optimist who sings sea chanteys to the oysters as he's pulling them up in the nets, and jokes that as the campaign takes time away from work on the water and at the gym, he's lost the calluses on his hands.

The election this fall may come down to which version of Platner voters think is real: the man with the tattoo and Reddit posts, or the one who channeled his frustrations into a vision for change. At the town hall in Orono last month, a middle-aged man took the mic during the Q&A and confessed to Platner that he was torn. His dilemma wasn't about Platner's past comments but his fears for the future. Would Platner become another John Fetterman, the Pennsylvania Senator who rode a wave of progressive promises to Washington and then tacked to the center, disappointing the Democrats who sent him there?

"I want to believe you so hard. But I feel so cynical about politics right now. It's not the first time we've seen this *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* thing," the man said. "Why are you different?"

Platner swept a hand across his auburn beard and launched into his pitch: He doesn't want to join the Senate to be part of a system. He wants to rip that system apart and build a better one. But that, he acknowledges, requires a leap of faith for voters to believe that he won't betray their values and has truly transformed. "There's also an element of this," Platner admits, "Where I really have to say: 'Just trust me, bro.'" □

Former YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki Died From Lung Cancer in 2024.











Family snapshots capture Wojcicki as an executive, mom of five, and athlete









Her Family Is Trying To Find Out Why

By Alice Park

IT STARTED WITH PAIN IN HER HIP. SUSAN Wojcicki, 54 at the time and the CEO of YouTube, was a frequent runner and often swam in the company pool. *Maybe it's just sore muscles,* she thought, hoping the pain would resolve itself. She was in Europe attending a conference in the summer of 2022 and didn't have time to give it much thought.

When the pain persisted after she returned home to California, she decided to get an MRI. The scan said she had cancer.

Stunned, Wojcicki called her primary-care doctor, who was equally surprised and suggested she repeat the scan. She texted her sister Janet, a professor of pediatrics and epidemiology at the University of California, San Francisco, and told her the report showed bone cancer. "She said, 'I did it at a questionable radiology center because I wanted a quick MRI, so I'm going to repeat it,'" says Janet, who connected her sister to a radiologist friend. Even then, "I was joking with my friend that we didn't think it was possibly real."

The second scan showed the same thing, and doctors believed that the cancer found in Wojcicki's bones had spread there from another source. "Sure enough, it was cancer, and it was metastatic," says Wojcicki's husband Dennis Troper, a project management director at Google. "It was a bomb dropping in the room."

Wojcicki had lung cancer, which kills more than 125,000 Americans each year, more than any other cancer. It wasn't on her radar: She had never been a smoker. She was healthy, active, and only in her early 50s. Yet people like Wojcicki, who don't fit the classic picture of someone with lung cancer, are increasingly developing the disease. While people with a smoking history make up the bulk of lung-cancer cases and deaths, up to 20% of new diagnoses in the U.S. and worldwide are in nonsmokers. By the time most of these cases are diagnosed, they have already advanced and spread to other organs, at which point the disease is difficult or, often, impossible to treat.

Wojcicki decided not to reveal her diagnosis publicly and continued to work at YouTube until stepping down in early 2023. Behind the scenes, she and her sisters, Anne—who founded genetic-testing company 23andMe—and Janet, spent the next two years aggressively searching for answers to the questions Wojcicki asked herself over and over again: Why did this happen? Was there something she could have done to prevent this cancer? She tested her home for radon—the second leading cause of lung cancer, behind smoking—and investigated air-pollution patterns where she lived, but none yielded satisfactory answers. In the search for better treatments for her advanced disease, it became clear that she was at the vanguard of an ignored group of people who were falling through the cracks of lung-cancer care.

After exploring and trying various cutting-edge therapies, including by joining clinical trials testing experimental approaches, Wojcicki passed away in 2024. Several months after her death, her family posted a letter on YouTube that she had written, revealing her cancer journey and her intention to "fight for better understanding and cures for this disease."

Although Wojcicki died without knowing why she developed lung cancer, her family hasn't stopped looking for answers. In some of the first interviews about Wojcicki's cancer journey, they shared with TIME, and also with *Good Morning America,* their decision to launch the Susan Wojcicki Foundation in order to fund efforts to diagnose lung cancer earlier, particularly for nonsmokers, and change recommendations about who should be screened for the disease. Inspired by organizations such as the Michael J. Fox Foundation, for Parkinson's disease, and the Susan G. Komen Foundation, for breast cancer, the family hopes to reframe how the public views lung cancer and change screening guidelines to include anyone—not just smokers—who might be at higher risk. "If you look at nonsmoking lung cancer, that is the fifth largest killer of all cancers," says Troper. "It's a crisis."

I MET WOJCICKI'S SISTERS and husband at the family's farm, which is a short walk from their home in Los Altos Hills, Calif. The garden, beekeeping hives, and coop with more than a dozen egg-laying chickens were all Wojcicki's idea—a way to connect her five children to nature and part of Wojcicki's healthy lifestyle. In addition to exercising almost every day, she avoided sugar and ate naturally grown food as much as possible.

Before the cancer diagnosis, the farm was where the Wojcicki sisters and their families would spend time together and gather for holidays. After, it became something of a headquarters for the family and the experts they invited over to figure out how to defeat her cancer. "From day one, this was a project," says Anne of the fight to save her sister's life—similar to the ones they would embark upon as children. "I remember [Susan] calling us and saying, 'You guys are in charge. I can't deal with this, so I'm putting you guys in charge of solving this.'"

A more qualified team could hardly have been assembled. The Wojcicki sisters are all such recognized leaders in the fields of science and technology that Mattel released Barbies in their likenesses in 2023 as part of its STEM series. The sisters grew up on the campus of Stanford University, where their father was a physics professor, and were always involved in projects together, from making and selling spice ropes to putting on magic shows.



Their parents had always encouraged them to be independent thinkers and voice their opinions. "We grew up thinking that it was a very negative thing to not speak your mind," says Janet.

After learning about her sister's diagnosis, Anne called dozens of her contacts in the medical community from her years of building 23andMe, which declared bankruptcy as a commercial testing company in 2025 but now exists as a nonprofit research organization, the 23andMe Research Institute, which Anne runs. She and Janet visited leading experts at the National Institutes of Health, who weren't optimistic about Wojcicki's chances. Hearing this from experts on science's cutting edge was a "watershed moment," Janet says. "They said, 'It looks really bad. You should go home and appreciate the time you have.'"

'We felt, "This is a research problem; we can absolutely tackle this."'

—ANNE WOJCICKI

But the sisters couldn't simply accept the dire prognosis. "It goes back to our childhood and the mindset of being fearless, and always stepping up," says Anne. "We had no issue calling up the heads of different institutions and saying,



Anne, left, and Janet, right, Wojcicki chased a cure for their sister's cancer for years

'We have a problem.' We were super-aggressive advocates. We felt, 'This is a research problem; we can absolutely tackle this.'"

DRIVING THEIR DETERMINATION was the fast-changing world of cancer therapies, including breakthroughs in immune-based treatments and cell-based strategies known as CAR-T, which they were convinced would help their sister. "The hope was that science is moving really rapidly, and it was almost like, in Susan's mind, she needed to stay alive long enough to capture some of those changes and innovation," says Anne. "But we knew it was an uphill battle."

The sisters soon learned that lung cancer in young nonsmokers is generally driven by specific genetic mutations that are not present in people who get smoking-related lung cancer. The good news is that certain targeted therapies address those mutations and can extend survival, but these are most effective if started early in the disease, before tumors spread to other organs.

Even if the family couldn't do it in time to help their sister, they thought, figuring out how to treat patients like her could be Wojcicki's legacy. Since before her diagnosis, Wojcicki and Troper had been funding cancer-research projects through their joint philanthropic efforts. That work, combined with the projects that Janet and Anne were pursuing to learn more about early-onset lung cancer, formed the seed of the Susan Wojcicki Foundation. The Troper and Wojcicki families have committed $150 million to launch the foundation; Melinda French Gates, Google, and Salesforce (whose CEO and co-founder, Marc Benioff, owns TIME with his wife Lynne) have also provided significant contributions.

In addition to funding research, the foundation is working closely with YouTube to raise awareness and change the public perception that lung cancer is solely a disease caused by smoking. Wojcicki had set the stage for such a health-education role for YouTube years before she learned she had cancer. At a time when the platform was more known for promoting fluffy content, Wojcicki wanted to harness its influence for more substantive goals. She recruited Dr. Garth Graham, then at CVS Health, to head up a new initiative at YouTube to provide reliable, validated health information from qualified sources. "The idea she had was that many people start their health care journeys on Google and YouTube, and video is a very important part of demystifying complex clinical topics: heart disease, diabetes, and a cancer diagnosis," says Graham.

Graham is now designing a strategy that will make YouTube a resource for both the public and health care providers to learn about the risks of lung cancer among nonsmokers, and to inform them about the latest early-detection developments as these advances occur. Google—which was started in Wojcicki's garage when she took a chance on two Stanford graduate students, and where she was the 16th employee—is also working with the foundation to leverage AI-based analysis to accelerate the search for risk factors. "AI gives us an historical opportunity to understand the 'why,' and then we want to move into the 'what,'" Graham says. "What do you do, how do we save more lives, and how do we move forward on the issue of early detection?"

LUNG CANCER IS among the few cancers for which screening is determined by a lifestyle choice—smoking—in addition to age. The stigma, and guilt, surrounding lung cancer caused by smoking means that screening rates for the disease have always been, and continue to remain, low. Screening guidelines involve some complicated, nonintuitive math. People who should currently get screened for lung cancer include adults ages 50 to 80 who smoked the equivalent of a pack a day for 20 years, who currently smoke or have quit in the past 15 years. Even within this high-risk category, only

PREVIOUS PAGES: COURTESY SUSAN WOJCICKI FOUNDATION (7); THESE PAGES: CAROLYN FONG FOR TIME (2)

about 18% to 20% of eligible people in the U.S. get the screening test, a low-dose CT scan.

Breast, colon, and prostate cancers all have broad, age-based screening guidelines that have contributed to drops in deaths from these conditions. Wojcicki's sisters, as well as many lung-cancer experts, argue that it's time to broaden who's eligible for lung-cancer screening, because smoking captures only some of those at risk.

In their quest to cure Wojcicki's cancer, the sisters recognized that nonsmokers who develop lung cancer are a massively understudied population. Scientists still didn't know basic information about lung cancer in nonsmokers, including the comprehensive range of genetic factors driving the disease. Just a month before her death, in July 2024, the sisters opened the Lung Cancer Genetics Study to uncover more of those genes.

They have some hints from the few studies that have been done on nonsmokers who develop the cancer. Those increasingly show that the disease tends to disproportionately affect women—especially Asian women. It's a different demographic from Wojcicki's, but could provide clues about what other factors are driving lung cancer besides cigarettes. In 2021, researchers in Taiwan conducted a nationwide study at 17 hospitals of nonsmokers with lung-cancer risk factors like a family history of the disease, smoking, tuberculosis, and exposure to secondhand smoke or poorly ventilated cooking areas. The participants received a low-dose CT to look for lung cancer, and it was detected in 2.6% of the group. Encouragingly, 96% of these cases were detected at Stage 0 or Stage I. Having a family history of lung cancer was the most significant risk factor of those studied, but the findings revealed how prevalent lung cancer was among people who didn't smoke. Based on the results, health officials in Taiwan are now starting to screen more nonsmokers there with those risk factors.

At NYU's Perlmutter Cancer Center, Dr. Elaine Shum conducted a similar study. She screened 1,000 Asian American women who had those sorts of risk factors and found cancer in 1.3% of cases—which is a higher rate than the one reported in a national lung-cancer screening trial of smokers.

"If I had Stage I lung cancer, I would want it to be picked up," says Iona Cheng, professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at UCSF. She and her colleague Scarlett Lin Gomez oversee the Bay Area portion of California's cancer registry, a database of all cancer cases diagnosed in the state that is part of the U.S.'s national surveillance system of the disease. They began exploring risk factors for lung cancer among nonsmokers after a cancer doctor at Stanford University asked them whether the growing number of young, nonsmoking Asian women with lung cancer that she was seeing was part of a broader trend, or unique to her patient population. Cheng and Gomez received a grant from the National Institutes of Health to launch the Female Asian Non Smokers Study, or FANS, to analyze the trend. "We were able to answer, 'Yes, rates are higher among Asian females who never smoked relative to other ethnic groups of females who never smoked,'" says Gomez. "So FANS is now taking the next step to ask the question: Why?"

Other scientists are also mining databases for clues about what makes some nonsmokers vulnerable to lung cancer. Hilary Robbins and Mattias Johansson, both scientists at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) at the World Health Organization, received one of the first two grants from the Susan Wojcicki Foundation, to hunt for factors in the blood that could flag nonsmokers at higher risk of developing lung cancer. The database they're mining contains blood samples from more than 7,000 nonsmokers who developed lung cancer. "Often there are proteins perturbed by early signs of disease," says Johansson. "Those are the signals we are looking for in our research."

SO MUCH OF CANCER CARE today is built around treating cancer after it occurs, rather than trying to detect it before it ravages the body. That's a mindset the Susan Wojcicki Foundation hopes to help change with the other initial grant, to maintain another repository of blood samples from nonsmokers diagnosed with lung cancer. Dr. Sana Raoof, a radiation oncologist at Brown University Health Cancer Institute, oversees the biobank and plans to scour samples for any molecular signals circulating in the blood that could distinguish them from those who don't develop cancer. "This is the future of the war on cancer," she says. Such lab-based tests, if developed, could detect cancer far earlier. "Right now, we're catching cancers in late stages in the majority of never-smokers. Until that changes, it really felt to me that it doesn't matter what types of therapies we come up with, because we are not addressing the root problem."

'The future of reducing deaths from lung cancer is early detection.'
—DR. SANA RAOOF

Raoof knows the challenges of creating blood tests for cancer; well-funded efforts to pick up multiple different cancers from the blood have not been successful to date. But with advances in AI and in the understanding of the genetic changes driving some of these cancers—and with enough samples from patients—she believes such a test could be available soon. "The power of the foundation is that it can help accelerate the search for new people with newly diagnosed



Dennis Troper, Wojcicki's husband, is continuing his wife's quest to change screening guidelines

lung cancer who are low risk," she says. "There is a whole world of molecular biology out there that has not entered the space of screening. We believe the future of reducing deaths from lung cancer is early detection."

If and when such a test for picking up lung cancers early becomes available, the next challenge will be putting it in the hands of doctors where it can have the most impact. That's where Wojcicki's experience and vision at YouTube may become a critical factor. The education and awareness campaigns that the foundation plans for the platform will ideally prepare public-health and health care professionals to advocate for lung-cancer screening in a wider population, once data support that the practice is safe and effective. "Many people are unaware of the impact lung cancer has, particularly on nonsmokers," says Graham of YouTube Health. "One of Susan's major visions was the idea of demystifying health, and how to create health care information that is engaging and understandable." In this case, "it's about how the general public should understand the risks around lung cancer, the warning signs, and the importance of screening. We also know a significant amount of clinicians come to YouTube for things like medication education, so it's an opportunity to educate the clinician community as well."

Her family says Wojcicki didn't explicitly express her desire to establish a foundation or specific initiative around lung-cancer cases like hers, because throughout treatment she expected to beat the odds and stay one step ahead of the disease. She received her last therapy, an immune-based experimental treatment for lung cancer involving retraining her T cells to attack her cancer, at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. She was hopeful enough that this treatment, which is now approved for melanoma but not yet for lung cancer, would buy her more time that she looked for an apartment in New York, anticipating returning for additional treatments. "We walked into Memorial Sloan Kettering thinking we would come out a month later, cancer-free from that treatment," says Troper. "We had high hopes until the very end."

After Wojcicki passed away, it was clear to her family that the work needed to continue, even if it hadn't been able to save her life. "This is something we have the imperative to carry on," Anne says. "Susan's name should be associated with all the things she did with her career. But I think, hopefully, she is also associated with saving thousands of lives because she destigmatized it and advocated for early detection."

The family is also determined to finally answer the question that started it all: Why did she get this?

"I remember Susan and I were in the hospital room, and she was very weak at that point," says Troper, becoming emotional at the memory. "But she looked me in the eye and said, 'Dennis, I don't care what you do when I'm not here, but do something meaningful.'" ◻

CAROLYN FONG FOR TIME

OCEANS

EVERY CORAL COUNTS

RESEARCHERS ARE RACING TO SAVE THE WORLD'S REEFS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRITTA JASCHINSKI

Coral reefs are home to 1 in 4 ocean species, support fisheries, and protect coastlines from storm surges and rising sea levels. And they are at risk. Last fall, scientists reported that warm-water coral reefs are passing their planetary tipping point, a threshold that, once crossed, leads to large, accelerating, and often irreversible changes. Photographer Britta Jaschinski spent six months with scientists across the U.K. and Germany as they race to make these critical ecosystems more resilient, whether by freezing coral sperm in biobanks or controlling coral reproduction in labs like the one pictured here. Molecular collections coordinator Laura Sivess of the Natural History Museum, London, and biobank manager Louise Gibson of the Institute of Zoology, London, collect coral fragments to be used in genetic-diversity and geographic-origin investigations.

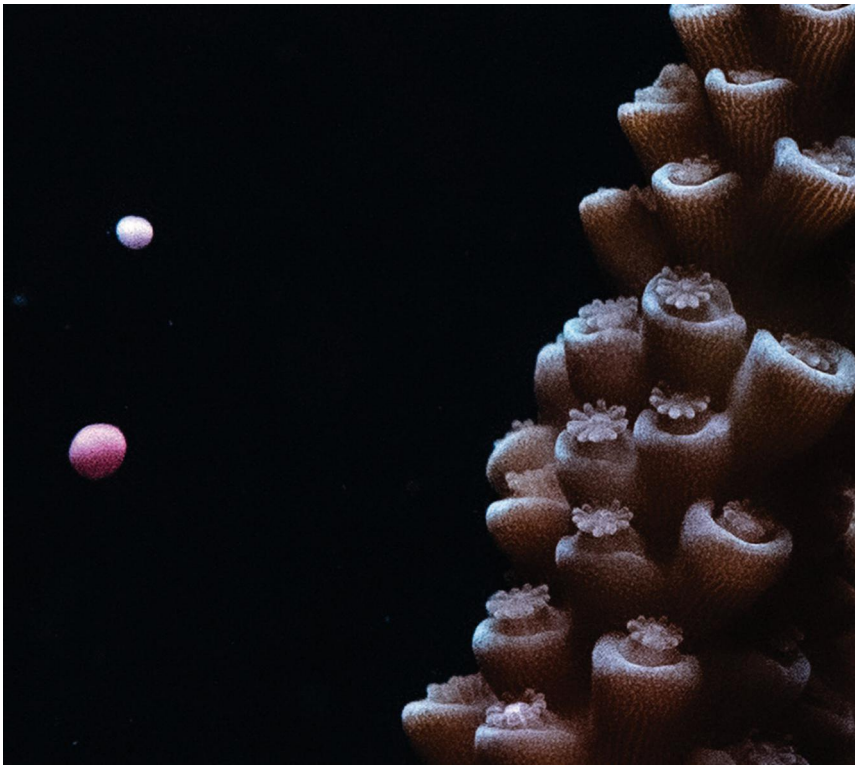
—Simmone Shah



The aquarium pictured is filled with smuggled and confiscated corals that now help researchers in the battle to preserve threatened reefs

Our future reefs

In the wild, corals release eggs and sperm into the sea during mass spawning events, but rising temperatures are disrupting these delicate cycles. But replicating seasonal temperature changes and natural lunar patterns can trigger these reproductive events in labs. In 2024, scientists at the Horniman Aquarium's Project Coral lab in London successfully spawned and reared the threatened pink sea fan, marking the first time the species was successfully raised in captivity in the U.K. "It's not a silver bullet," says Jamie Craggs, principal aquarium curator at the Horniman Museum and Gardens. "Restoration is not going to rebuild the world's reefs. The scale at which we need to act is just far too vast for the current technology that we have. Restoration is about buying time in pockets to give corals at least a fighting chance into the future."







During a spawning event, corals package their sperm and eggs together into small bundles called gametes that rise to the water's surface. This method of reproduction allows reefs to spread over a broad geographic area while increasing genetic diversity. Coral typically spawn only once a year—cues from the lunar cycle and the water temperature prompt entire colonies to release their gametes around the same time.







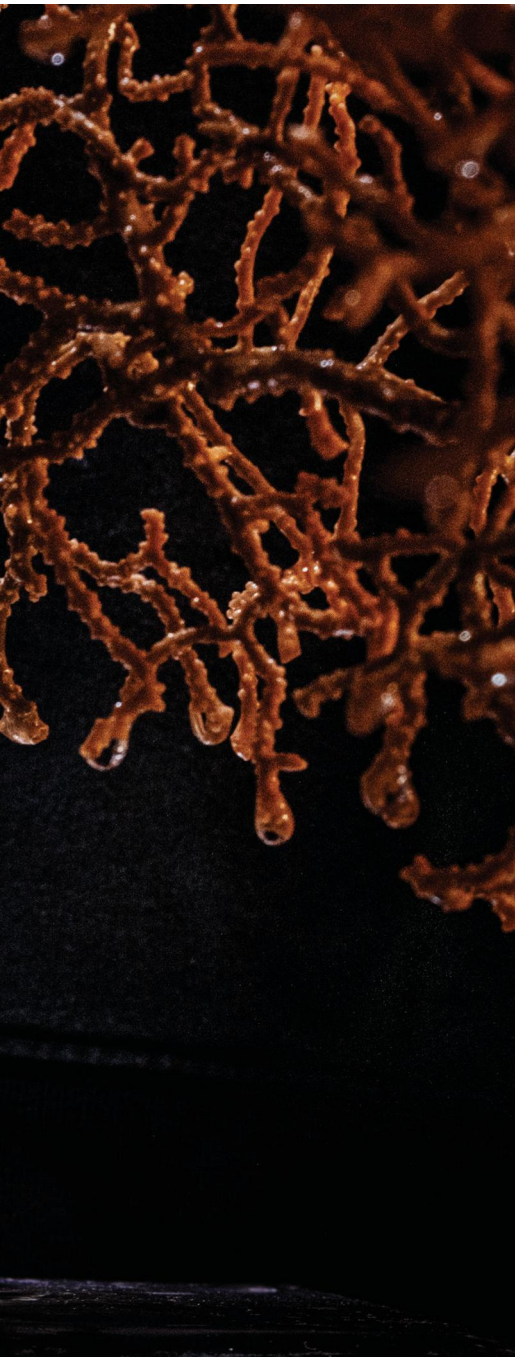
In aquarium trials, corals are gradually exposed to higher water temperatures, raised by about 1°C per day to see when they bleach—expelling the algae living inside them and losing their vibrant color. Many start to bleach when temperatures rise just 1°C to 2°C above their usual summer maximum. After the trials, bleached corals are moved back to cooler water to recover. Studies show corals previously exposed to mild heat stress can sometimes become more tolerant in later events. These experiments help researchers understand which are more likely to survive in warming oceans.

Jamie Craggs feeds a lab-born juvenile Acropora *under the "watch" of its parents—the adult colonies flanking it. If corals are too far apart to reproduce naturally, scientists can bring them together to assist fertilization and rear larvae. Selectively breeding the strongest corals can produce more adaptable offspring better equipped to withstand accelerating warming.*

Ten-month-old Trachyphyllia *corals (also known as open brain corals) with diverse genetic makeup attached to coral frag plugs—mounts that secure them as they grow. Diversity plays a key role in boosting resiliency, making some corals more resistant to heat stress. Gene editing meanwhile helps scientists understand which genes are responsible for greater thermal resilience.*

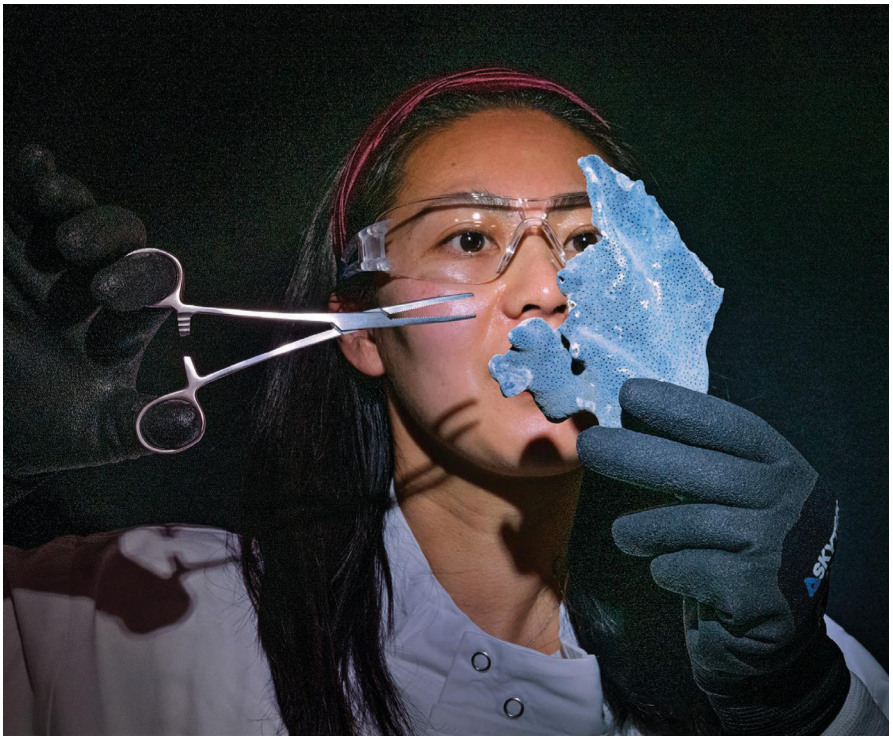


Controlled feeding regimens, water-quality management, and larval-settlement support help researchers improve juvenile coral survival rates before outplanting them onto vulnerable reef habitats. These advances also provide critical insights into the species' reproductive biology and resilience to environmental stressors like warming seas and ocean acidification. "There's lots of variation between different types of corals," says Jamie Craggs. "Some already naturally, across the population, have a higher thermal tolerance than other species."





Samuel Nietzer of the University of Oldenburg, in Germany, collects gametes after lab-triggered spawning. In his lab, a kind of coral IVF takes place, and new coral larvae develop within a few days. Traditional reef restoration often relies on fragmenting and replanting existing corals, while lab-controlled breeding can create genetically diverse offspring from carefully selected parent colonies. "When you fragment a coral again and again, you may have hundreds or even thousands of pieces that you can bring out on a reef, but it's genetically all the same," notes Mareen Moeller, Nietzer's colleague and partner. Meaning, they are all equally vulnerable: "Any stressor that comes in will affect all of these fragments exactly the same."



Louise Gibson observes a blue coral (Heliopora coerulea). *Researchers learn about reef restoration, coral resilience, and environmental history from coral fragments, leveraging both living pieces for restoration and dead skeletal parts as historical records.*

OCEANS OF VALUE

A new ecosystem of companies is seeing the benefit in protecting the seas

BY JUSTIN WORLAND



COURTESY OCEAN AERO

LONG BEFORE PIERRE PASLIER became an ocean entrepreneur, he was a plastics-packaging engineer, turning fossil fuels into the materials needed to ship and sell cosmetics. But he knew there had to be a better way. After taking a break from the corporate world, he went back to school and launched into an experimental phase with his co-founder Rodrigo Garcia Gonzalez. In a makeshift kitchen lab, they played around with food materials trying to figure out which would do the best job at mimicking plastics. Before long, they hit on a clue: imitation caviar, whose tiny membranes are made from seaweed, behaved in some ways like the packaging they were trying to invent.

The company they founded in 2014, Notpla (think "Not Plastic"), eventually expanded to build a product line including takeaway boxes, flexible films, rigid cutlery, and seaweed-based paper. Perhaps more importantly, it joined a growing ecosystem of startups committed to simultaneously making use of ocean resources and supporting their conservation. Inspired by companies like Notpla, the bank Standard Chartered in 2023 wrote a white paper on seaweed, declaring it an investable asset category. Suddenly, capital began to flow to seaweed startups. Today, more than $780 million has been invested in seaweed ventures, according to Phyconomy, a seaweed-investment tracker. "I see Notpla as a good visible application to make the case for why it's worth spending more of our attention, brains, and dollars to the ocean space," says Paslier. "There are a lot of solutions that are going to come from it in the future."

Those solutions couldn't come fast enough. Oceans face continued and deepening threats from humans, from overfishing to plastic pollution. Coral reefs are dying at such a clip that scientists warn of irreversible loss. At the same time, oceans face the challenge of funding pullbacks from governments and nonprofits. The fractured geopolitical landscape also hampers efforts to forge international conservation agreements, even though some big successes like the High Seas Treaty have moved forward. But some environmental advocates, alongside a growing number of entrepreneurs and investors, are coming around to a realization: position this threat slightly differently and it actually becomes an opportunity.

Last year, J.P. Morgan estimated the value of ocean-related activity, what it called the "annual gross marine product," at $2.5 trillion annually. And it noted that ocean-climate startups have raised over $5 billion in venture funding over the past decade. Most is early-stage financing, meaning there may be much more to come as companies mature.

"We need to continue growing an asset class that is not just for impact investors or philanthropic investors, but something that people look at as part of their portfolio," says Philippe Cousteau, founder of the ocean-tech company Voyacy Regen, and grandson of famed oceanographer Jacques Cousteau. This is easier said than done.

Oceans are a new investment category, and there's no guarantee enough investors will buy into the thesis to make it more than just a niche. Even if they do, it will be difficult to reach finance levels required to meet the scale of the challenge. And some ocean advocates say the private sector is poorly positioned to decide which practices are actually sustainable, much less protect oceans equitably.

Though the first Law of the Sea dates to the Middle Ages, oceans are profoundly difficult to regulate and manage—especially as some



Ocean Aero's 14-ft. Triton autonomous vehicle can be used in defense, scientific, and energy sectors. It collapses the solar panel to submerge

governments abandon climate policy. Guy Standing, an economist whose book *The Blue Commons* is considered a landmark in ocean protection, describes it as a "Wild West situation" as President Donald Trump disrupts seemingly any intergovernmental collaboration. It's in this gap that the private sector could determine the future. Its role in ocean protection may not have been the first-best option. But with oceans in worsening shape and governments occupied with other priorities, it would be foolish to ignore the possibilities.

At first blush, Notpla may not sound like an oceans company. While the key material input is seaweed, Paslier and his co-founder aren't oceanographers or marine biologists. Much of the company's work happens in London, far from the seaweed farms that supply its core ingredient. And its end use, namely packaging, is in some ways a more obvious categorization. But the company wears its ocean label proudly. Indeed, the raw material is its biggest selling point. And seaweed's biodegradability keeps plastics out of the ocean. Paslier says that as of this year the company has successfully replaced 40 million single-use plastic products. Most fundamentally, the company rests on the premise that oceans have value worth protecting. "Life started in the ocean," he says. "We're really kind of like a massive step behind in terms of understanding, paying attention, and learning what can be done."

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, it's been almost impossible to miss the proliferation of companies pitching a new product at the intersection of oceans and sustainability. No matter where I go, there they are. In Rio de Janeiro ahead of COP30, I met with the CEO of Matter, a company that makes filters to capture microplastics from washing machines and textile factories before they end up in rivers and eventually the ocean. At a clean-tech incubator in London, I met with Global OTEC, a company that uses ocean heat to generate electricity offshore. The company aims to provide small island countries with a reliable power source. And at this May's Milken Conference, an influential business and finance gathering, I spoke with Cousteau about Voyacy Regen. The company builds coral-reef replicas to install in areas where reefs have been lost or are suffering. Cousteau roots his pitch in economics. "Do-goodery will never unlock that scale of capital," Cousteau says—the goal is to build something that "meets all the criteria for any other infrastructure investment."

There's certainly plenty of that. Think of firms using oceans to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere or those selling solutions that help communities adapt to rising sea levels. It includes offshore wind companies and ventures to capture tidal energy. Pharma startups are hoping they might source ocean ingredients for the next big drug. The World Economic Forum counts more than 880 companies as part of its ocean-startups coalition, but it's almost certainly an undercount. "This is not a small, niche, cute area," Kate Danaher, managing director of oceans, at S2G, an investment platform. "You can't look at the ocean as a sector. It's more of a theme."

In a way, taking this mindset is an advantage. Broadening the aperture means a wider universe of companies to fund, and protects against challenges in one technology or sector. But it also poses risks. Most investment firms lack teams with oceans expertise. Even those that do have them may not know about the specific part of the ocean that any given company is focused on. This will pose a growing challenge as companies mature and need to attract investment from a broader group that includes traditional private equity and major banks.

This disconnect will come to a head in the coming years as the first ocean investment funds, launched in the past decade amid urgent climate concern, reach maturity. Successful companies that either raise more money or stand on their own will give investors a sense of true opportunity. As with any company, the key is creating a business

'You can't look at the ocean as a sector. It's more of a theme.'

—KATE DANAHER, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF OCEANS AT S2G



model that someone else will pay for. That means solving a problem or creating an opportunity for customers, not just advancing ocean protection. "When I go to speak to a textiles manufacturer, I am basically talking about how we're going to save them money," says Matter CEO Adam Root of the microplastics filter that cuts down on machinery wear and tear.

One group of companies that have seen particular success amid geopolitical tensions are those that can claim to be at the intersection of oceans and defense. Think of companies that monitor and map the seas. They were built, in many cases, to provide conservation data, but now serve another purpose entirely as the U.S. and Europe increase spending on technologies with military or intelligence applications. But investors are not blindly optimistic, acknowledging that the shifting winds around emissions reduction have hit companies primarily offering decarbonization solutions, like those selling expensive carbon credits or producing offshore wind.

Corporations, of course, are just one part of the broader funding picture. For decades, financial firms have explored how boutique mechanisms can help fund nature protection, including oceans. Blue bonds provide money to countries at favorable rates, if the funds are used for ocean protection. And debt-for-nature swaps help alleviate national debt in exchange for nature protection. These financial mechanisms have had some success, but they have struggled to scale. Successful ocean companies could change the way the private sector thinks about what it means to invest in—and earn a return from—oceans.

'We need a new model to rescue the commons.'

—GUY STANDING, AUTHOR OF *THE BLUE COMMONS*

STANDING, THE BRITISH labor economist, is best known for his advocacy around universal basic income and calling for governments to play a more robust role guaranteeing citizens financial security. In his 2022 *The Blue Commons,* he challenges the concept that many ocean entrepreneurs and like-minded advocates have termed the blue economy. Oceans underpin all of human society; purely financially motivated efforts to protect them are, he argues, destined to fail. When we spoke in April, Standing expressed dismay at how collective efforts at ocean protection have stumbled or even moved in reverse. That said, he doesn't see private capital as the solution. "I don't expect private equity to suddenly change and become pussycats and look after the environment," he told me. "We need

CQ; ILIA C. HENDEL—LAIF/REDUX; KELP: JANNES LANDSCHOFF—SEA CHANGE PROJECT

CO_2 is stored before being piped under the sea shelf in Equinox's Northern Lights project

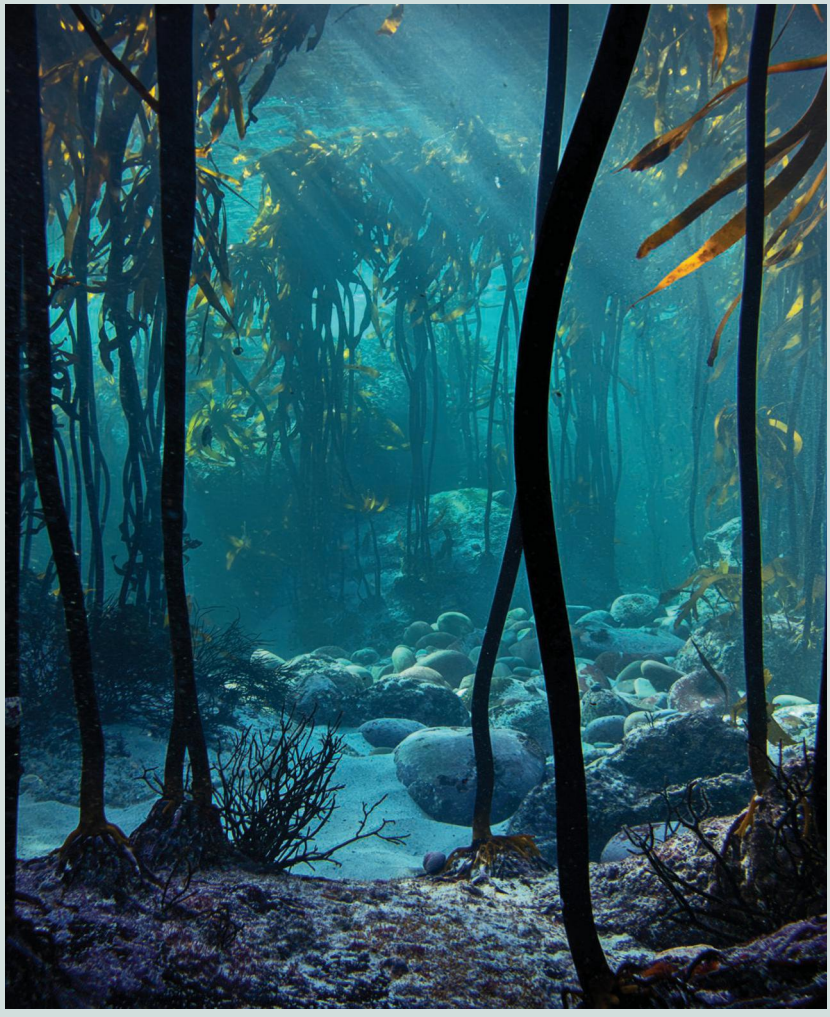
a new model to rescue the commons."

It shouldn't be controversial to say the private sector isn't a replacement for public-sector action, particularly when it comes to setting the rules of the road. Investors and entrepreneurs are experts at thinking about how to solve market problems, not about the broader ethical and political questions lurking under the surface. In most of my conversations with them, my question about how they define sustainability remained largely unanswered. Some things do seem beyond the pale to this group. Think deep-sea mining or offshore oil drilling. But the technologies they tend to tout, from offshore wind to carbon capture, come with their own trade-offs.

In an ideal world, decisions about how best to balance these factors would be decided by governments after consulting with the best available science and considering the political, economic, and societal implications. Instead, official lack of consideration of the value of oceans may actually be slowing investment. Alfredo Giron, who heads the World Economic Forum's Ocean Action Agenda, says governments can play a key role by emphasizing the economic necessity of ocean protection. "The big capital is not going to flow for real," he says, "until [the] perception is changed."

Big companies recognize the problem. They know their supply chains are threatened. They know many of their facilities face rising sea levels. But companies, by their very nature, are focused too narrowly to solve those global problems. We probably do need private-sector money to flow into oceans. But the irony is that the private sector may need government guidance just as much. Once the direction of travel is clear, the billions of dollars flowing into ventures today can turn into the trillions needed.

This story is supported by a partnership with Outrider Foundation and Journalism Funding Partners. TIME is solely responsible for the content



THE OCEAN UNDERSTORY

Biodiversity is the bedrock of resilience, and kelp forests show why

BY TATJANA BALETA

AT THE EDGE OF CAPE TOWN'S CITY lights, one of the ocean's most intricate ecosystems is held together by creatures most people have never seen. Here, beneath the swaying kelp canopy of the Great African Seaforest, a helmet snail rises from the sand, siphon probing like a periscope for the scent of sea urchins. It disarms their prickly spines with slime and liquefies their innards with acid, keeping the grazers in check and the forest from being devoured.

The snail, in turn, must evade the masterful octopus that creeps between the anemone-encrusted rocks, while above them sharks prowl through the kelp understory. Between urchin spines, tiny crabs and juvenile abalone take shelter while hungry fish swirl past. Each is part of a living network of interactions. Remove enough strands, and the sea forest begins to unravel. Scientists say it is these intricate relationships that allow ecosystems like this to survive a warming ocean. Yet they remain dangerously overlooked, even as they die off.

The Great African Seaforest is the world's only "sea bamboo" forest, a vast underwater jungle stretching over 621 miles from Namibia's desert coast down to the tip of South Africa.

Cold upwellings rise from the deep, bringing nutrients that fuel an explosion of life, much of it found nowhere else on earth. For at least 100,000 years, humans have lived alongside this ecosystem, foraging limpets and mussels from tidal pools and diving through the kelp for pearlescent abalone and fish. Today, the sea forest still sustains coastal communities and fisheries.

DESPITE OUR LONG HISTORY with this ancient ecosystem, "we are only beginning to grasp the magnitude of biodiversity yet to be discovered here," says Jannes Landschoff, marine biologist at Sea Change Project, the South African nongovernmental organization behind *My Octopus Teacher,* which was filmed in the Great African Seaforest. In partnership with the Save Our Seas Foundation, they are creating the 1001 Seaforest Species app to catalog the science and stories of this kelp ecosystem—from massive flying-saucer stingrays and inquisitive fur seals to peacock feather-duster worms flaring like underwater fireworks.

Underpinning the existence of all this life is the kelp itself: a large seaweed that grows in towering columns with long brown blades curling outward like leaves. These tall steeples create a living architecture unlike anything else in the ocean. Like forests on land, kelp forms dense canopies at the sea surface that shade a midwater understory, while below, their gnarled rootlike holdfasts sculpt the seafloor. Each layer supports its own community of organisms.

The Great African Seaforest is not the planet's only sea forest. Kelp fringes nearly a third of the planet's coastlines, from California and Chile to Norway, Japan, and Australia. These ecosystems are as productive and important as rain forests or coral reefs, but far less well known or studied. What happens inside kelp forests shapes wider ocean health. They sustain coastal fisheries, cycle nutrients, and buffer coastlines from storms as sea levels rise and extreme weather intensifies. Kelp has also received growing attention as one of the planet's most efficient carbon absorbers. Unlike engineered climate solutions still on the horizon, kelp forests already function as living climate infrastructure. Scientists say these benefits—valued at over $500 billion annually—depend on biodiversity.

And yet kelp forests are disappearing fast. Roughly half have degraded in the past 50 years as marine heat waves push waters beyond kelp's thermal limits, pollution and coastal development degrade shoreline ecosystems, overharvesting rips forests from the seafloor, and overfishing disrupts the predator-prey relationships that keep these systems in balance. "Kelp forests are the fabric that weaves together the ocean in our seas outside the tropics, and so when you start to pull apart the thread of that fabric, everything starts to unravel," says Aaron Eger, founder and program director of the Kelp Forest Alliance. Diversity—not just the number of species, but also the web of relationships between them—allows ecosystems to absorb shocks and adapt to change. When that web frays, ecosystems lose their ability to store carbon and produce food, water, and oxygen, while withstanding climate stress.

The U.N. has called biodiversity "our strongest natural defense against climate change," yet it remains underemphasized in climate strategy even as it declines. Unlike coral reefs, no global laws or policies focus on kelp forests. Only 16% are in some form of protected area and fewer than 2% under the highest protections, which prohibit all extractive activities. "There's not often intention put into protecting kelp forests—they are just captured as part of the larger seascape when marine protected areas are created," says Eger.

Despite global decline, some kelp forests are remarkably stable. The Great African Seaforest is one of them. Kelp here has largely escaped overharvesting, and marine protected areas have preserved biodiversity hot spots even as reef fish, rock lobster, and abalone have been overexploited. Though far from pristine and still facing growing threats, the forest is holding fast and extraordinary biodiversity continues to flourish in the kaleidoscope of light beneath its canopy.

If you are very lucky, you might witness the moment a mottled shyshark, denticle scales prickling for grip, wriggles free from her leathery egg, ending her five-month-long incubation and beginning life among furry sea fans and bright sponges. Nearby, an odd scrap of pink algae transforms, in a blink, to reveal itself as a tuberculate cuttlefish: an endemic shape shifter that matches colors and textures to dissolve away into the reef mosaic. The abundance is dizzying, the beauty overwhelming. The wonder of it all inspires people to protect what remains. In a warming world, this sea forest offers a glimpse of what remains possible if life, in all its spectacular forms, is given a chance.

KELP FORESTS UNDER PRESSURE

Underwater kelp forests hug about a third of global coastlines. Many are endangered by climate change and other forces



'We are only beginning to grasp the magnitude of biodiversity yet to be discovered.'

—JANNES LANDSCHOFF, SEA CHANGE PROJECT

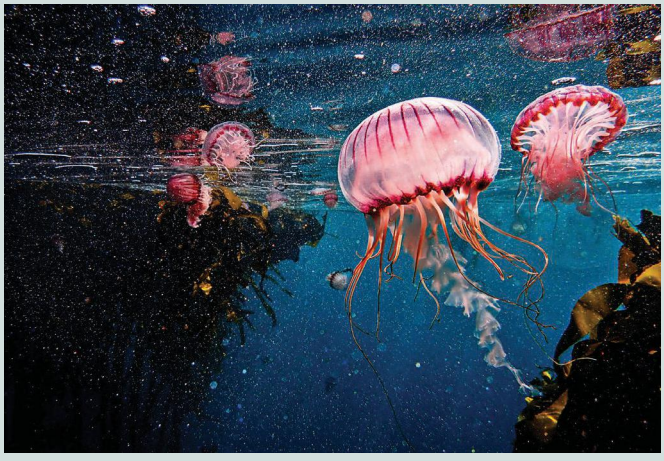
MAP SOURCE: SEA CHANGE PROJECT. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT (1–3): CRAIG FOSTER (1, 3); PIPPA EHRLICH (2, 5); JANNES LANDSCHOFF (4)—SEA CHANGE PROJECT

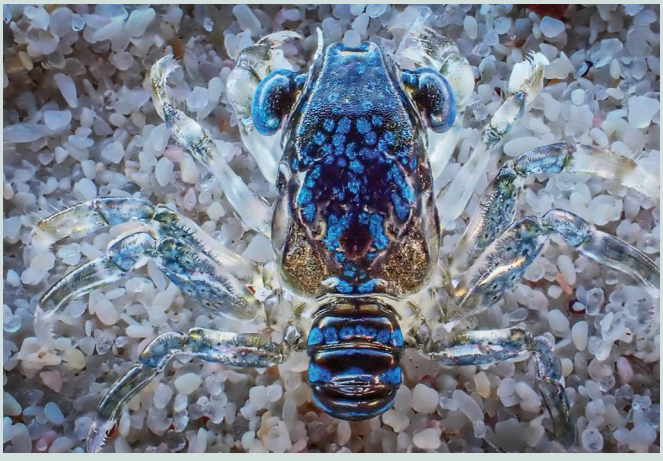






The sea forest is stage to thousands of hidden stories. *Clockwise from top left: A young limpet finds its home in the kelp canopy; a curious Cape seal peers through the fronds; a Simon's Town cuttlefish glides over an urchin-covered rock; an alien-like megalopa—the post-larval stage of the Cape rock crab—emerges in the intertidal zone; dozens of Agulhas compass jellyfish swarm in the shallows*





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RED WEDDING SEASON

BY JUDY BERMAN

Across pop culture, celebratory rites are devolving into bloodbaths

INSIDE

THE *STRANGER THINGS* TEAM HEADS TO A RETIREMENT HOME

THE BEST OF THE CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

TOM HANKS GOES DEEP ON WORLD WAR II

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY NEIL JAMIESON FOR TIME

WEDDING SEASON HAS BARELY STARTED, and already this year I've witnessed enough catastrophic nuptials for a lifetime. I'm not talking about tacky dresses or those ill-timed downpours that struck Alanis Morissette as ironic. The weddings I have in mind were soaked in tears, vomit, and other bodily fluids. Many involved violence or death, of the soul if not the flesh. One union was sealed by satanic rite, alongside a pit of corpses. Another ended with lifeless bodies splayed out on the dance floor or slumped in their plates, their blood staining white tablecloths crimson.

I wasn't physically present for any of this, thankfully. These nightmare celebrations happened in shows and movies released within the past few months. Although there's horror in the mix *(Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen, Ready or Not 2: Here I Come),* their genres vary, from the dystopian teen drama of *The Testaments* to the Victoriana of *Wuthering Heights* to *The Drama*'s black comedy. Not all concern heterosexual love (see: *Half Man*). The common factor is a wedding so traumatic, any guest would be lucky to make it to the afterparty with body and sanity intact.

Brutal fantasies like *Game of Thrones'* Red Wedding massacre aside, this is not the way we typically see these sacred rituals depicted onscreen. Think of the sumptuous spectacles of romance, family, and culture that make up the wedding-movie canon: *Monsoon Wedding, My Big Fat Greek Wedding, Crazy Rich Asians, The Wedding Banquet, The Best Man.* Having a beloved couple (Jim and Pam, Cory and Topanga) exchange vows was once a foolproof way to juice TV ratings. To the generation now eyeing the altar, such ostentatious bliss may be a relic of more innocent times. But this year's red wedding season probably says less about their cynicism toward the institution of marriage than it does about broader anxieties regarding the future.

THE PRESUMPTION THAT a woman's wedding should be the best day of her life has outlived many waves of feminism. But in Gilead, the totalitarian patriarchy that supplanted the U.S. in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* it's essentially the law. Hulu's *The Testaments,* an adaptation of the sequel, spends its first season among privileged pubescent girls training to be Wives to powerful men. A ceremony joining one such character, Becka (Mattea Conforti), to a young Commander, Garth (Brad Alexander), is the centerpiece of the finale. It's a wrenching scene—not just because Becka is in love with her best friend, Agnes (Chase Infiniti), who is in love with Garth—but because it is interspersed with shots of the bride's mom being executed for the murder of the bride's dad. In fact, it was Becka who killed her father, a dentist who molested his teenage patients. Agnes is one of his victims.

Gilead has always been a chilling vision of what America might become if right-wing theocrats seized absolute power and stripped women of all independence. A wedding in Gilead reveals the misogyny still latent in a ritual supposedly liberated from its origins as a transfer of property from father to husband. Evidence suggests that progress toward equality within heterosexual marriage has not moved in a straight line since women's lib. Just this year, a 29-country study found that Gen Z men are twice as likely as their baby-boomer counterparts to believe wives should obey their husbands. Which might help explain why the share of 12th graders who hoped to marry someday decreased between 1993 and 2023—a trend almost entirely accounted for by girls' declining enthusiasm.



The Testaments' *bizarre betrothal love triangle*

The imagery of gendered oppression suffuses many of the fictional weddings resonating with younger viewers. In her fever-dream *Wuthering Heights,* Emerald Fennell opens a sequence in which Cathy (Margot Robbie), who is obsessed with Jacob Elordi's foundling Heathcliff but must marry up, finally weds milquetoast Edgar (Shazad Latif), with a closeup of the bride's inflamed flesh beneath corset laces. Fennell skips over the ceremony, to a scene of Cathy alone at a banquet table where Edgar's clingy ward, Isabella (Alison Oliver), gives her the wedding gift of a Cathy doll, installed in a dollhouse identical to her new home. Led to her bedroom, Cathy learns its walls were painted to match her skin, down to a freckle. Welcome to a uniquely feminized hell.



RUSS MARTIN—DISNEY

It's Elordi—Gen Z's 6 ft. 5 in. monolith of masculinity—who plays the groom in the third season of HBO's erstwhile teen drama *Euphoria,* which ages up its high schoolers to early adulthood. Elordi's Nate, a controlling alpha engaged to Sydney Sweeney's hyperfemme Cassie, forbids his wife to work outside their retro suburban home, stranding her amid shag carpeting and yellow wallpaper. This grotesque '50s fantasy dies at their gaudy wedding, which begins with Nate vomiting; talk of diarrhea and divorce, not joy, brings Cassie to tears walking down the aisle. A gangster creditor crashes the reception, leading her to realize Nate's been lying about his finances and decide the marriage is over before it's begun. Yet the show goes on, from their tacky dance number to the limo ride home. As he's beaten in their living room later that night, she sobs operatically: "It was supposed to be the best day of my life!"

Maybe the typical wedding remains an exercise in female subjugation and compulsory heterosexuality, but straight women aren't the only characters suffering at the altar. As Nate's ordeal implies, masculinity is its own torture chamber. Nowhere is that clearer than in *Half Man, Baby Reindeer* creator Richard Gadd's HBO series. Steeped in violence, sexual confusion, and dark machismo, it traces the bond between two unrelated men who were raised as brothers, framed by a vicious fight at one of the characters' wedding to another man.

Elsewhere, the gendered power imbalance between fiancés echoes a more dramatic disparity in wealth, class, or both. Cathy and Cassie see their husbands as their best chance at securing comfortable lives. FX's *Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. & Carolyn Bessette* bewitched a new generation with its tragic fairy tale of a chic commoner whose ascent to American royalty is sealed with an excruciating wedding to which she arrives hours late as paparazzi helicopters circle.

Grace's (Samara Weaving) initiation into high society is gorier in 2019's *Ready or Not,* set on her wedding night, when her new husband's family of Satan-worshipping aristocrats hunts her in a deadly game of hide-and-seek. This year's sequel climaxes with Grace hijacking her *second* wedding to a satanic heir by killing him and banishing his oligarchical cabal to hell. Camila Morrone's Rachel is about to save herself from an ancestral curse, in Netflix's *Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen,* by marrying her rich fiancé (Adam DiMarco), when he decides her damage isn't worth his trouble. The rejection triggers a bloodbath at his parents' massive vacation home,

Both horror stories have simple plots but are more complex in their attitudes toward marrying for money or power or security. Grace and Rachel's lives were precarious until they met rich guys. The only problem is, fortunes come with moral baggage. They have to surround themselves with exploitative monsters who don't care whether they live or die. What seemed like an ideal mode of survival turns out to be even scarier than eking out an existence on their own.

You're damned if you say 'I do' and damned if you don't

A PLUSH PRISON, violent death, or the minefield that is independence—you're damned if you say "I do" and damned if you don't. It's a bleak vision of adulthood. But, as the cost of living soars, the economy further polarizes, and AI eats entry-level jobs, it's not hysterical. Hence the constant reports that young people are anxious, lonely, stressed, hopeless. Last year, a Gallup–Walton Family Foundation study found that only 39% of Gen Z adults feel they're "thriving" (vs. 56% of Gen Z middle and high schoolers; what a difference paying your own bills makes). If a wedding is two people's public expression of confidence in their shared future, then it makes sense that the most miserable fictional weddings are striking a chord.

For a regular couple intent on beating stacked odds, the sanest option might be to embrace the chaos. The focal point of *The Drama,* a twisted rom-com that shares with *Euphoria* a star in Zendaya and an arty, youth-focused studio in A24, is another calamitous wedding. This time, there's no great discrepancy in status; both fiancés are part of the urban, white collar middle class. Following bride Emma's (Zendaya) confession that she once planned a school shooting, tempers flare, mistrust festers, nasty gossip circulates, and groom Charlie (Robert Pattinson) channels his panic into an abortive hookup with a co-worker. It all comes to a head at the reception, where his bizarre behavior gets him socked in the face; the next thing we know, he's coming home alone with a bruised face and a bloodstained tux.

A red wedding doesn't have to herald a failed marriage, though. It can be a test for two people who love each other to pass together. *The Drama* ends not in eternal misery, but with Charlie and Emma reuniting, battered and dirty, at a diner. "Do you live around here?" she asks, still in her gown but pretending to be a stranger. It's the best gift a person who has screwed up their wedding can receive: a second chance at making a future. ◻

REVIEW

Orphan Black star delivers *Maximum Pleasure*

BY JUDY BERMAN

A GREAT FACT CHECKER IS A DETECTIVE, INTERROGATING every statement as if it's a case to be solved. No one can get more out of a Google search. But it's offline, doing the timeless, shoe-leather work of journalism, where they really excel. Often forgoing the glory of a byline, fact checkers serve a purpose nobler than ego: truth. If they weren't an endangered species, vanishing from the payrolls of newsrooms in crisis, you'd wonder why we so rarely see them in the crime shows that now dominate TV.

Maximum Pleasure Guaranteed, an Apple TV series that releases new episodes on Wednesdays, corrects this oversight. With a single mom eking out a living as an excellent but undervalued magazine fact checker for a hero, this witty crime thriller takes its tale of sex work, motherhood, and loneliness in genuinely surprising directions. Yet its fidelity to the truth of each idiosyncratic character makes the show's whiplash narrative feel believable.

Tatiana Maslany, who made her versatile reputation playing a dozen clones in *Orphan Black,* channels all her talent into *Pleasure*'s singular protagonist. Divorced and angling for an overdue promotion, Maslany's Paula is also gearing up for a custody battle. Her ex Karl (Jake Johnson, impressively devoid of his signature gruff charm) wants to move their daughter, Hazel (Nola Wallace), from New York to Boise with his new partner, Mallory (Jessy Hodges), a polished grownup who makes the bohemian Paula feel like a mess. The stability the couple can demonstrate, relative to her psychological and financial precarity, makes her worry they'll win. And that's without anyone knowing she's been spending her meager paychecks on sexy video-chat sessions with a camboy (Brandon Flynn's Trevor).

Her fear of being exposed becomes suddenly, terrifyingly real when their virtual date is interrupted by violence. Paula can only scream and film her screen as a masked man beats and drags away her sex-worker confidant. When she reports the abduction, a deadpan police detective (Dolly De Leon, a highlight) informs her that *she's* likely the real victim—of an extortion scam. Sure enough, calls come in threatening to kill Trevor and ruin her life if she doesn't pay up. When the cops shrug off her tips, Paula must scrutinize the evidence to save not just her reputation, but also her relationship with the child who means everything to her.

THE MOST FRUSTRATING THING about the preponderance of crime dramas is how flat their characters tend to be. Defined by circumstances more than personality, they are either victims or psycho killers. If we're lucky, we get a brilliant but troubled detective. Yet an unlikely upside to the trend is emerging. Now that just about every show—even comedies—must have some element of crime, writers who care about characters are improving the genre.



Paula (Maslany) juggles work, parenthood, and a scam that goes from virtual to violent

Maslany is the dynamic center of a story that twists in unexpected directions

A veteran of the similarly offbeat but fatally flawed crime shows *Sugar* and *Hunters,* creator David J. Rosen does just that with *Pleasure.* Maslany is the dynamic center of a story that twists in unexpected directions, giving Paula enough intelligence, warmth, and edginess to make her character cohere. Around her, Rosen builds an ensemble out of well-matched duos, drawn in enough detail to give the series potential beyond its first season.

Mallory's ruthlessness in the custody fight begins to alarm wishy-washy Karl. De Leon's jaded but shrewd Gonzalez endures a brasher, greener partner (Jon Michael Hill). Especially fun is the work-spouse flirtation between Paula's younger colleagues, Geri (Kiarra Hamagami Goldberg) and Rudy (Charlie Hall). Barbed banter aside, they're more loyal to each other than to Paula. Which helps to explain why a woman who once seemed to be the ultimate cool Portland mom is now so lonely in Queens, she pays to confide in a camboy. In a world of symbiotic twosomes, the person who completes her—the one she'll never stop fighting for—is Hazel. ◻

REVIEW

In a community of elders, stranger things happen

BECAUSE THE DEFAULT AUDIENCE for horror is young and male, the genre's archetypal hero is a blood-soaked babysitter, preferably in some state of undress. Maybe the appetite for jump scares ebbs with age because growing older triggers so many real terrors. There's the body horror of malfunctioning organs and sagging skin; the psychological horror of dementia, or, worse, the condescension of people who treat you like you're senile when you're not; the supernatural horror of carrying the ghosts of everyone you've lost. And, of course, looming death.

These frights all pop up in *The Boroughs,* a Netflix sci-fi horror series set at a retirement community in the New Mexico desert. With *Stranger Things* creators the Duffer brothers as executive producers, it's an empathetic take on aging that captures the pain of being discarded and the joy of finding late-in-life purpose and friendship. A cast led by Alfred Molina, Alfre Woodard, Geena Davis, Clarke Peters, and Denis O'Hare embodies a refreshingly contemporary form of senior citizenship; instead of dozing off to *Matlock,* these boomers take psychedelics and practice free love. The trouble comes when creators Jeffrey Addiss and Will Matthews try to synthesize all of their compelling characters and ideas into an overarching statement.

We take in the Boroughs, with its retro eateries and golf courses, through the skeptical eyes of Molina's Sam. The crankiness of the former aeronautical engineer can, in part, be attributed to the annihilating loss of his wife Lilly (Jane Kaczmarek). She was the one who wanted to retire to this megadevelopment of identical midcentury modern cul-de-sacs. But her death didn't void their contract, so Sam's kind daughter, Claire (Jena Malone), delivers him to his new life in hopes he'll adjust. A gregarious neighbor, Bill Pullman's Jack, introduces him to a surprisingly fascinating crew. Ex-journalist Judy (Woodard) and her hippie husband Art (Peters) are at a marital impasse. Renee, who used to manage bands, is so cool, only Davis could play her. A doctor struggling with his own terminal diagnosis, Wally (O'Hare), vows to fill his remaining days with "cocktails and chaos."

***THE BOROUGHS* OFFERS** a bottomless supply of both. A mystery monster is slowly killing residents, and the glamorous couple that owns the complex (Seth Numrich and Alice Kremelberg) seems more concerned with maintaining order than with investigating. Certain that going public with their fears will only get them confined to the Boroughs' eerie nursing unit, Sam and his friends must defend themselves.

Easily the best of the three Netflix series the Duffers have shepherded since *Stranger Things* ended last year (including the animated spin-off *Stranger Things: Tales From '85* and wedding chiller *Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen*), *The Boroughs* shares that franchise's Spielbergian mix of horror and heart. The producers have also cited Ron Howard's film *Cocoon,* another sci-fi story set in a retirement community. Like that classic, the show excels at humanizing, through sharp performances by an all-star cast, characters Hollywood too often caricatures as cute or crotchety, when it deigns to pay them any attention. Even without monsters to fight, the denizens of the Boroughs would be a fun hang.

The Boroughs shares _Stranger Things'_ Spielbergian mix of horror and heart

I do wish we got to know them a bit better. Sadly, *The Boroughs* also shares with *Stranger Things* a tendency to stop developing characters and relationships after efficient introductions. (The exception is Wally, a gay man whose memories of the AIDS crisis complicate his every choice.) Instead, both shows keep adding portentous but vague themes until so many ideas have been articulated that only the most anodyne takeaways survive. In this case, the horrors and the pleasures of old age are, finally, reduced to mushy platitudes: "Time is a gift." "Why does anyone do anything? Love." You'd think people staring down mortality would have more penetrating insights to share. —J.B.



Not going gently: Boroughs residents O'Hare, Molina, and Woodard

MAXIMUM PLEASURE GUARANTEED: ZACH DILGARD/APPLE TV+; THE BOROUGHS: NETFLIX



Like night and day: Teller, left, and Driver play dissimilar brothers

MOVIES

A tender thriller of bonds and fissures

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

SOME THRILLERS ARE ENJOYABLE ENOUGH WHILE you're watching, then vaporize the instant the credits roll. But there's a rarer kind that follows you home with the feeling you're being shadowed by a thief, stirring a fear of loss that wasn't there before.

Writer-director James Gray's *Paper Tiger*—which played in competition at the Cannes Film Festival—is that second kind. It's about a family whose members don't know how happy they are until suddenly they aren't. It's about brothers who both resent and look after one another, the loneliness of being a parent when you can't protect your children. In places, this picture is wrenchingly tense, playing on the audience's nerves the way you'd tighten the pegs on a violin. *Paper Tiger* is old school in the best way, the kind of movie so many American directors have forgotten how to make, if they ever learned at all.

Set in 1986 Queens, *Paper Tiger* opens on Labor Day weekend: The kids are bummed about going back to school. The parents are happy for the same reason. Mom and dad Hester and Irwin Pearl, played by Scarlett Johansson and Miles Teller, are getting ready to ease their teenage sons, Scott and Benjamin (Gavin Goudey and Roman Engel), into the new school year when Irwin gets a call from his older brother. Gary (Adam Driver), a retired cop, is going through a divorce and needs extra dough. He has an idea for a consulting business and wants to recruit Irwin, an engineer, to work with him. Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal, long a disaster of sludge and sewage, is ripe for development, and the Russian businessmen—if you want to call them that—moving in to take advantage are clueless about U.S. regulations. It sounds like easy money. Irwin is in.

Paper Tiger is old school in the best way

THE BROTHERS ARE DISTINCTIVE from the start. When Gary invites himself to Irwin's for dinner, at least he brings the dinner: a fancy meal from Peter Luger's steakhouse. He's freewheeling and glamorous, and the kids adore him. Irwin is a windbreaker dad, earnest but clueless about the larger world. The first meeting with the Russians doesn't seem to faze him. When he steps out to survey the canal, we see it through his eyes: the shimmery gunk atop the water makes it look almost magical.

Irwin is dizzy with the possibility of making better money for his family. One night, he drives the boys to Gowanus to scope out the scene. His good intentions trigger an incident that makes him realize how dangerous his new associates are. Hester is hit with new anxieties too: while driving the kids to school, she hits a tree—something is off with her vision, though she tries to hide it. Gary keeps swaggering through life. He's got a distinctly masculine breeziness, and Irwin envies it.

Paper Tiger is an operatic picture about what you can lose in a heartbeat if you're not careful, or just unlucky. It's a tender thriller, featuring actors who know what they're doing: In Teller, Irwin's naivete becomes a dangerous liability. Johansson's performance, both fierce and delicate, is superb. And Driver's Gary is the can-do guy who can do anything. When he realizes he can't, the molten despair in his eyes is nearly unbearable.

Mainstream American movies are in a dark place. *Paper Tiger* was one of only two American pictures in the Cannes competition this year. But it's almost everything you could want in a grownup movie. This is the kind of picture you make when you see the landscape around you narrowing instead of expanding. Your choices? Go big or go home. With *Paper Tiger*, Gray does both. ◻

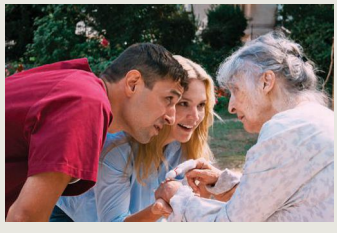
MOVIES

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CANNES

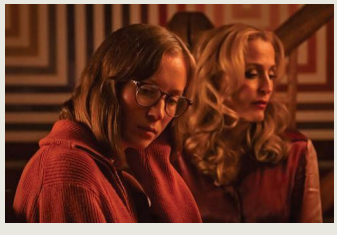
This year's Cannes Film Festival, which ran from May 12–23, was light on Hollywood fare, but there was no shortage of terrific films. Here are a few to look out for.



Fatherland
Sandra Hüller and Hanns Zischler star in Pawel Pawlikowski's stunning drama, economical yet lyrical, detailing German exile Thomas Mann's 1949 visit to his homeland.



All of a Sudden
French Belgian actor Virginie Efira anchors Ryusuke Hamaguchi's three-hour-plus drama about a care-home administrator who seeks greater compassion in a regimented world.



Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma
X-Files fans take note: Gillian Anderson is sultry and superb as a reclusive retired scream queen in Jane Schoenbrun's queer slasher send-up.

CANNES (5)

MOVIES

A master applies his colorful palette to familiar themes

PEDRO ALMODÓVAR IS ONE OF OUR most emotionally generous filmmakers; his glorious oversharing isn't beside the point—it *is* the point. The good and bad news is that *Bitter Christmas,* which premiered in competition at Cannes, is more of the same of what we've come to expect from him. His recent pictures—2024's *The Room Next Door* and 2019's extraordinary *Pain and Glory*—have had a ruminative, brooding quality. Almodóvar is feeling old. But then, who isn't?

Bitter Christmas features a filmmaker, Bárbara Lennie's Elsa, who has not only lost her creative spark, but is also struggling with debilitating migraines. Even through her pain, she seeks to persuade one friend to abandon her cheating husband and reaches out to another who's lost a child. She also has a loyal, much younger boyfriend, Bonifacio (Patrick Criado), whom she treats as an afterthought—not a triumph of feminism but evidence of her callousness.

All these characters are figments of another character's imagination: Raúl (Leonardo Sbaraglia) is searching for the key to his next movie, only to tear a page from the real-life travails of his loyal assistant, Mónica (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón), who recently left him to help a friend deal with a tragedy. One narrative nests within another; Raúl's story, set in 2026, is "real" life, while Elsa's, in 2004, is his creation. But he doesn't seem to realize that other people's experiences aren't ripe for the taking; this becomes a metaphor for the selfishness of creation. He too has his own "Bonifacio." The Jenga puzzle of parallels comes to feel daunting, perhaps too cleverly artificial.

Even so, *Bitter Christmas* is so enjoyable that you almost will yourself into believing Almodóvar isn't simply reworking some of his recent preoccupations. In the end, it may not be as deep as it strives to be. But still we come for the colors, the histrionic plots, the faces, the revelations. It's hard to get enough of the too-muchness of Almodóvar. —S.Z.



Bárbara Lennie and Victoria Luengo are figments of a filmmaker's imagination

Tom Hanks The Oscar-winning actor and filmmaker on his new World War II docuseries, the legacy of *Saving Private Ryan*, and his vision for America on its 250th

The docuseries *World War II With Tom Hanks* debuts on History on Memorial Day. Can you talk about the significance of that timing? In Stephen Ambrose's book *D-Day,* he talks about what could have been the first American killed on D-Day: a paratrooper standing in the doorway, ready to jump. He never got out of the plane because it was hit by a shell. Memorial Day is about that guy.

How are you thinking about July 4 as America celebrates its 250th? The Fourth of July is about the beginning of the two-steps-forward, one-step-back process of making our nation a more perfect union. We will never be perfect—but we've had 250 years to figure out how we get closer. The beginning of the *Superman* show when I was a kid—"truth, justice, and the American way"—that's what July 4 is about.

You narrate all 20 episodes of the series. What was that process like? It was the opposite of coming in and reading words someone came up with. None of us wanted to say, "OK, here's another haiku of narration from Hanks." There was some stuff that, as soon as I read it, I turned to the control booth and said, "Has this been vetted? Is this true?" It ended up being a constant education of saying: "I. Did. Not. Know. That."

If American high school students could all glean one thing from the doc, what might that be? For a populace to say, "We did not know our neighbors were being rounded up and sent away" is as though today we would say, "I don't see any signs of homelessness in America." No. It's obvious. It's happening. We cannot be complicit in 2026. Otherwise, look what we might re-create.

It's hard to talk about World War II and Hollywood without talking about *Saving Private Ryan.* *Saving Private Ryan* was the granddaddy. Many veterans who had actually been there were old and leaving us. When I first spoke to Steven [Spielberg] about it, he said, "I'll finally be able to make the movie about Omaha Beach I've been wanting to." The only thing missing was the smell. The visuals and special effects were so tactile that I knew of people who left [the theater] after 10 minutes.

What keeps drawing you back to World War II? Steven and I have gone on to examine the themes and moments with *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific.* Now it is more important for this work to speak about: How does this reflect our behavior today?

What excited you about playing Abraham Lincoln in the upcoming adaptation of George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo*? Saunders is a genius. It took me 80 pages until I finally figured out what was going on, but oh, my God! The thing that struck me was: I do not play so much this grand historical figure on the $5 bill. I play a grieving father that has lost his son. There is nobody on the earth that will not be moved by that.

You also happen to be distantly related to Honest Abe, yes? Yeah. His mother was Nancy Hanks. His cousin was Dennis Hanks. They were from Kentucky, as are my ancestors. It's a nice claim to fame in fifth grade.

What makes you say yes to a project these days? Look, I'm almost 70 years old. On one hand, it has to be fun. On one hand, it has to be good. But the final analysis is: it's got to be worth telling the story. Unless you're somehow illuminating the human condition, I'd rather reorganize my closet. —KATIE SANDERS

What does moral courage look like today?

The best petri dish for tyranny is indifference. We have a choice every day to do something or not. For some of us, it's raising our fist and saying, "Not on my watch." For others, it's giving money. For others, it's continuing to tell the stories that matter.



KEVIN MAZUR—GETTY IMAGES/SERIOUSFUN CHILDREN'S NETWORK



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